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THE FUTURE STATE — HAMILTON



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THE FUTURE STATE
AND
FREE DISCUSSION;

FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

OF OAKLAND,

By REV. L. HAMILTON,

THE ECCLESIASTICAL ACTION UPON THEM.

[*THIRD EDITION.*]



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PREFACE.

FOUR reasons will explain why the following sermons appear in print. The desire of my friends to see them; the readiness of others to misstate their teachings; my willingness that the public should know the whole reason why I am under the necessity of separating from the Presbyterian Church; and above all, the hope that they may contribute something to the diffusion of a more healthful sentiment upon the main subject of which they treat. I am asked to "print *just as preached*." Only the slightest changes, in no way affecting the sense, therefore, are made in any part, and none at all in the second discourse, which gave the chief offense. The fourth was added to the course as serving to explain, and perhaps justify, the attitude of Free Discussion which I have taken. The Introductory History explains the rest. May the Truth prevail.



INTRODUCTORY HISTORY.

[The following is a history of the Ecclesiastical action provoked by the discourses here given to the public.]

On the 7th day of April last, the week following the Sabbath on which I had preached the second of three sermons on the Future State, the regular semi-annual meeting of the Presbytery of San José was held in the First Presbyterian Church of Oakland. Early in the session, a member rose and stated that he had learned that there was great excitement in the church and congregation about some sermons that the pastor had lately preached, and the peace of the church required that Presbytery take some notice of the matter. It might not be necessary to take any formal action; they were not prepared for this, as no formal charge had been preferred; but he moved that Bro. Hamilton be invited to a "fraternal conference" with Presbytery, and requested to read the sermons in question, and make such explanations as he might see fit. Presbytery voted this motion. I was glad to have a "fraternal conference" with the brethren and readily acceded to their request. The sermons were produced and read. After some discussion a committee was appointed to confer privately with me, and report. The conference was entirely frank and cordial on both sides; and after sleeping on the matter, the committee submitted a series of resolutions to me which, if passed by Presbytery with my assent, pledged me in effect to state from the pulpit before my congregation that as the views of the future life which I had preached were not revealed in the Bible, but were merely speculations of my own, I did not claim for them the authority of a divine revelation. This being directly contrary to my convictions, I

declined to give such a pledge. They then requested me to state in writing what I would do for the peace of the church and the satisfaction of Presbytery. I retired and hastily drew up a statement of my motives in preaching these doctrines, my denial of the false inferences that others had drawn from my teachings, and closed with these words: "I do not expect to make these subjects prominent in my public teaching; it would be base and dishonorable in me to give a pledge that I would never intimate or express these sentiments in my private associations or public ministrations. I cannot give such pledge. I shall endeavor to use all due discretion, and shall respect the opinions and feelings of my brethren who differ from me in whatever I may feel bound in conscience to say on these points." After a few words of remark, a funeral service, which I had previously engaged to attend, called me away. I left, stating that I should say more on the subject if I had time; and carefully made and repeated the request that if Presbytery felt bound to censure my teachings, they would clearly specify the points censured, supposing that their Book of Discipline required this of them. Using all proper diligence upon my return, as I stepped into the door of the church the benediction was being pronounced, on the adjourned Presbytery. To my great surprise and pain, I received from the stated Clerk the following copy of the minutes of the action that had been taken in my absence. I give it just as it was given to me, certified by the stated Clerk.

"Rev. W. W. Brier, chairman, reported as follows:

I. That Rev. L. Hamilton's sermon on Matt. xxv: 46, read before Presbytery, contains teachings, in the judgment of this body, contrary to the word of God and the standards of our church.

II. That a committee of three be appointed to confer with Bro. Hamilton.

III. The Rev. L. Hamilton is hereby *solemnly enjoined* not to preach the peculiar doctrines of this sermon.

IV. That this Presbytery, when it adjourns, adjourn to meet in the Presbyterian Church of Oakland, on Thursday, June 9th,



at 1 o'clock P.M., to hear the report of the Committee of Conference.

Rev. Dr. Sessions, Walsworth and Brier were appointed a Committee of Conference with Mr. Hamilton. Dr. Eells was invited to act with that committee.

A copy of these resolutions was to be submitted to Bro. Hamilton by the stated Clerk.

V. 'Whereas, impressions seem to have been taken from the teachings of this sermon quite contrary to the author's sentiments; therefore,

Resolved, That Bro. Hamilton be requested to correct publicly these impressions *without reaffirming* the peculiar doctrines of this sermon.' "

I was thus requested to "correct publicly" false reports concerning my teachings without telling what I had taught—unless I would *deny* the doctrines. This was the "Fraternal Conference." Before entering the pulpit again I called a meeting of the Church Session. Rev. Dr. Sessions, as Chairman of the Committee of Conference appointed by Presbytery, came in by special invitation, and joined our deliberations. I then stated to the Session the action of Presbytery in *condemning* my sermon and *enjoining* me not to teach its doctrines; that this condemnation and injunction were passed in my absence,* and (notwithstanding my thrice repeated request) without specifying the doctrines prohibited; that this action seemed to me *judicial* in its nature, yet taken without due process of trial; that regarding it as irregular and unconstitutional, I did not feel bound by it as a member of the Presbytery; yet if the church as represented in the Session fully sympathized with and indorsed it, my sense of duty and fidelity to my own conviction of the truth would not permit me to return to their pulpit. I could not preach the Gospel with

* It was openly asserted in Synod, and the assertion allowed to pass uncontradicted, that Presbytery had a right to examine and condemn the sermon and enjoin the author not to teach its doctrines without any reference to his presence or absence. If this is Presbyterianism, I have not understood it. I am not now in a position to deny the assertion. If I were and could do so with any degree of truthfulness, I would deny it for the honor of the system. I should regard the admission of a particular wrong or mistake in Presbyterial action as far less damaging than the admission of such a principle in the system itself. I cannot decide as to the right of Presbytery. I simply state what was done and how I regarded the act at the time.

such a gag in my mouth. Dr. Sessions stated, on the side of the Presbytery, that they did not regard their action as *judicial* but *admonitory*, and to prevent mischief that would arise from the further public preaching of doctrines which Presbytery felt to be erroneous and contrary to the standards of our church, and which had already created an excitement unfavorable to the interests of religion.

After a free interchange of opinions, the following resolutions were passed:

"*Resolved*, That the Presbytery of San José be requested to expunge the word '*enjoined*' and substitute therefor the word '*requested*' in a certain resolution passed by them at the recent session of that body in the City of Oakland, and add thereto the words that were originally appended to the resolution:—(No. 3)—'During the pendency of the fraternal conference between the Committee of the Presbytery and the Rev. Mr. Hamilton.'" [Dr. Sessions confirming the statement that had been made to me that such a clause, after debate upon it, had been deliberately stricken out.]

"*Resolved*, That we have full confidence in the ability, integrity and faithfulness of the Rev. Mr. Hamilton, and urgently solicit his continuance in his ministrations as heretofore among us." Ayes—Dr. W. Newcomb, E. Bigelow, J. J. Gardiner, W. C. Dodge, G. W. Armes, and Prof. H. Durant; Noes—none.

On the two Sabbaths next ensuing, I preached the third and fourth of the sermons composing this pamphlet. The excitement raised by the Presbytery subsided. The 9th of June came, and with it the Presbytery again. The above request of the Session was presented to them and readily granted. A member then rose and said, that having learned that Bro. Hamilton's sermons following the meeting of Presbytery had been satisfactory and had allayed the excitement created by his former discourses, he moved that the further consideration of this matter be postponed till the next regular meeting at Brooklyn, in August. This was carried. This easy disposition of the case led me to suppose the matter virtually ended. I was mistaken. At the August meeting it was called up again. I said frankly that I had nothing to retract, and while I intended to be prudent, could not consent to any abridgment of my liberty to teach the

doctrines condemned. The old "injunction" to silence was then moved and vigorously pressed. I stated that such action, if taken, must terminate my connection with Presbytery. The question was about to be put, with a majority manifestly in the affirmative, when Judge S. A. Hastings, lay-delegate from the Alameda church, in evident reluctance to have the matter come to the extreme result threatened, rose and moved the following resolution:

"Resolved, That further discussion of this subject be postponed, and Bro. Hamilton be requested to prepare a document specifically setting forth his views on the doctrines of Future Punishment and Probation after death, and present it at the next meeting of this Presbytery."

Against this it was at first objected that the Presbytery had already been too lenient, too slow; that religion was suffering in the churches from their over-indulgence to me; but the motion finally carried. The first Wednesday in October, at 1 o'clock, p.m., was appointed for the adjourned meeting; place, the Howard Church, San Francisco, the Synod having appointed its annual meeting there on the evening of that day.

The appointed hour brought a full Presbytery together. The requested statement of my views was read. (See p. 12.) After some discussion a committee of three was appointed to examine the paper and recommend some action on it. The next day they presented the following report:

"Your Committee report: That the paper read by Rev. L. Hamilton, expressing his opinions on Future Punishment and the possibility of forgiveness of sins after death, contains views not according to our standards; yet they do not destroy the vital doctrines of the Christian religion. While we accord our brother liberty to clothe his thought in language of his own and to preach the whole truth, we are bound to enjoin upon him a careful study of the Confession of Faith and to conform his teachings to the system of doctrines therein contained."

This was briefly discussed, when Presbytery was obliged to adjourn till the next day.

The Committee had once unanimously agreed upon this report. But before any motion was made for its adoption, the one who presented it at the next session moved the following substitute:

"*Resolved*, That the paper presented by Rev. L. Hamilton on the subjects of Future Punishment and Probation after death, contains doctrines so contrary to the word of God and our Confession of Faith, and to the doctrines of vital importance to the salvation of men, that the license asked by him to preach those doctrines exceeds the highest liberty that should be given to a minister of the Gospel; and that, therefore, the Presbytery enjoins upon him not to teach them."

The adoption of this substitute was moved and carried, only one member voting in the negative, and one, at his own request, being excused from voting. The direct contradiction between the report first presented, and the substitute for which two members of the committee finally voted, is apparent—the one pronouncing the doctrines touched "vital," the other that they are not. How they could first agree upon the one and then consistently vote for the other is not quite apparent to me.

When this action had been consummated, I felt that a great wrong had been done me and the cause of truth. I was not willing to go to the extreme of defying the excommunication of Presbytery; I had no wish or ambition to head an independent movement. So to leave no measure untried by which I might hope to get this wrong set aright, and upon the advice of friends whose judgment I trusted, I resolved upon the only recourse left me—*appeal to Synod*. I at once communicated my intention to that body, then in session in the same church; and they promptly voted that when they adjourned, they would do so to meet at the call of the Moderator, at such convenient time and place as he might name, to hear and issue this appeal.

Pursuant to this adjournment, Synod convened again in Oakland, January 13th, 1869. The argument contained in the second Article (see p. 22) was presented. The history of the previous action in the case was given in detail. The intimation having been thrown out publicly that I had violated my ordination vows in preaching doctrines contrary to the standards of the Presbyterian Church, and that it was dishonorable for one holding and teaching such doctrines to remain in a Presbyterian pulpit, I gave my reasons for the course I had pursued. I had asked myself whether my difference with the standards was of such magnitude as to justify so serious a step as withdrawal from

the ministry of the Church; whether it would not subject me to the charge of needlessly impugning the liberties she would allow; whether one of her teachers, upon reaching such a difference on one point in his investigations could be justified before his own conscience or the Christian judgment of the people, in making that difference the ground of forming a new church, or seeking a connection in other respects, perhaps, less congenial. The answer my own mind gave would not excuse me for going out of the Church. I had believed the Presbyterian system elastic enough to make room for my difference. Hence I asked the Synod to reverse the decision of Presbytery. If they could not do this, then they would give me an excuse and justification for some other step. I had supposed that if I could give an impregnable argument from the Bible for the doctrine I had taught, it would have influence toward a judgment in my favor. It was just the contrary. It would have been only arguing successfully to make out a stronger case against myself. Had I convinced every member of Synod that the doctrine was thoroughly scriptural, the result would have been, not to procure the liberty asked to preach it, but to make every one feel bound in conscience to leave the Presbyterian pulpit. "Preach it" I was told, "if you believe the Bible teaches it, but not as a Presbyterian."

The vote was called, and *every voice but one was given to sustain the Presbytery.* The whole cogency of the reasons given was the necessities of "Church organization." I shall find no fault with this decision. I find myself in hopeless conflict with the system, and the system, as it seems to me, in 'hopeless conflict' with the Bible. If the doctrine be ever so clearly scriptural, Presbyterianism, *as it is*, cannot make room for it. I bow to this fact. Nothing is left me but to seek the door that leads outward from the system. I go with the utmost kindness of feeling toward those from whom it is necessary to sever my ecclesiastical relation. I go, firmly believing that at no distant day their noble old church, which has done the world good service in her time, will relax the bonds which forbid the possibility of the progress of religious thought among the ministry who remain in her communion.

STATEMENT BEFORE PRESBYTERY.

Moderator and Brethren:

At the last meeting of this Presbytery, a resolution was adopted, requesting me to state in writing my views of the punishment of the wicked in the future life, and of the possibility of repentance and forgiveness after death. In complying with this request, I shall, as far as possible, avoid complicating the question awaiting your decision by keeping mainly to the two points named. Yet, in order to be fully understood, it will be necessary for me to do something more than make a bare propositional statement of my views. Your patience will bear with me in giving all needed explanations.

In regard to Future Punishment, it is the peculiar aspect under which I have represented it, and *not its denial*, for which I am called in question. You have all agreed with me in discarding a material fire as the means. Upon my denial of any arbitrary and extraneous infliction of suffering upon the soul at the hand of God, a difference of opinion has developed itself among yourselves in debate. But the offending peculiarity of my view is in setting forth the future condition of an unrepenting soul as the exact contrast to the life of growing knowledge, love and joy in heaven. I have taught that it is an essentially diseased condition of the soul, it is most naturally conceived as a dying life, ever declining in knowledge, capacity and sensibility to suffering. But three conceptions of this subject seem possible to our choice. In naming them I will put that as first which I have adopted and just stated, and which may be called the natural or reasonable view. The second would make the future life of the impenitent an eternal, changeless monotony of misery, neither increasing, diminishing or varying in amount of capacity or suffering. This is too unnatural to need discussion. The third supposes an eternally increasing capacity,

wickedness and consequent misery. That any sane person of ordinary intelligence should seriously propose this as his belief, is indeed marvelous. The inferences it inevitably compels, make it too monstrous for credibility. We must then believe not only in an eternal state which utterly sets at naught every law and condition of the soul's life and development of which experience or reason gives any intimation here on earth, and in a kingdom of evil spirits eternally increasing in power and in hostility to the kingdom of God ; but we must also believe in an eternally growing suffering endured by countless millions of beings like ourselves, which must in the great cycles of the future reach an intensity of agony to which the hottest furnace of literal fire would be welcomed as a sweet relief, and this changing only as it goes on into still deeper agony. This we would represent as one part in a system which God has deliberately created in the clear foresight of this result. We would necessarily anticipate for ourselves either an inheritance in this suffering as our endless portion, or else that we should look upon it from another sphere of the future life with an eternal exultation of delight. Men delude themselves when they try to persuade themselves that they seriously hold a belief that so dishonors God and revolts all reason and humanity. It is simply *unthinking* acquiescence in teachings supposed to follow as a logical necessity from revealed truth. I am sure I could not *really* believe in such a doctrine without soon becoming an atheist or a fiend. I cannot hesitate to adopt and teach the first named of the foregoing alternatives.

As to the *duration* of future punishment, I have uttered in public no definite opinion. I have purposely, and with studied design, been indefinite. I leave that subject where I believe the Scriptures have wisely left it, veiled in mystery. Every one who will investigate, can easily ascertain for himself, that the Greek word used in the New Testament to express the duration of punishment in the world to come, and the words answering to it in Hebrew and the ancient dialects of Egypt and India, are all popularly used to express a very long, indefinite period. They all pronounce without qualification the sufferings of the wicked in hell to be eternal ; yet the fundamental doctrines of their religions that, at the close of certain immeasurable cycles, the hells and all created things are to be destroyed, and a new crea-

tion to be inaugurated, make it certain that they could not have meant to assert those sufferings to be literally without end. Scores of examples of its usage in this loose, popular sense, can be found in the Greek and Hebrew, for every one in which it bears the strictly metaphysical conception of endless duration. That our Savior in his teachings used it in the strict rather than in the popular import is, to say the least, contrary to probabilities. If you ask me, therefore, whether I am ready to teach that the sufferings of the wicked will be literally endless, I frankly answer I am not. Neither do I assert the contrary. I leave the matter with God. If I have ventured to express the hope that all *individual* sin and suffering would, in the mercy of God, in some way be brought to an end, I doubt not that I have in this expressed the real, though it may be secret, fact in the heart of my brother Presbyters—differing from you only in my judgment of the discretion of intimating such hope, and in the deeper sense of comfort with which I indulge it. Since I have attained the consciousness that it was not at deadly war with my theology or a reasonable interpretation of Scripture, I have found relief from that prolonged “horror of great darkness” which drove Albert Barnes to write, “In the distress and anguish of my spirit, I confess I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why man should suffer to all eternity. I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment’s ease to my tortured mind. It is all dark—dark—dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it.” I have learned to wonder that a man like Mr. Barnes, whose belief compelled this state of mind and rendered no other logically legitimate, and would necessarily, if true, make heaven still darker than earth, unless death kills every human sympathy and turns the saved into white-blooded* demons instead of pure spirits of love, did not

*The language of this article was stigmatized in Synod as “bitter and virulent towards Christians,” and these words were specifically referred to as an example. The imputation would be deserved if they had been applied to Christians; but I feel very sure that no Christian ever was, or ever will be, such as it is here intimated would deserve to be thus characterized. The example fails to support the charge. I know also that the doctrine of a life of eternally growing sin and pain strikes many Christian minds with the repugnance I have ventured to express. A Christian friend, well cultured in the best thinking of this time, to whom I read this article and the condemned sermon, writes me, along with an earnest caution against “leaving the shore of Scripture and rowing out into the sea of speculation:” “I do not see that your conception of the nature of punishment obliges you to say it is not eternal. You concede it may be, and your theory of it takes away the monstrosity of a Hell keeping pace with Heaven (and possibly getting a little the better of it in progress).”

dare to reconsider his creed, and see if he had not exaggerated the true conception of future woe. I have dared to hope there is some mistake in this view, and that an *earnest, real* faith in the truth, just as it is foreshadowed in Scripture and human experience, would not necessarily drive all sleep from the beds and smiles from the faces of rational beings.

But my defection from our standards of orthodoxy, against which the most strenuous scrutiny of Presbytery has been directed, is the doctrine that the Grace of Repentance and Forgiveness may be extended to some souls after death. I have never intimated in public or in private that this would be the indiscriminate privilege of all men, or of any who had hardened themselves against the truth and spirit of God in this life; nor have I asserted the certainty that all will accept this offer to whom it shall be made. I have simply claimed that it is a doctrine plainly taught by a few, and more or less clearly intimated by many passages of Scripture, and against which not one clearly contradictory text can be found in the Bible. I fully indorse the following, on 1 Peter, iv: 6, from the Commentary of Dr. Frommüller, the associate of Lange in that great Bible-work which several of the men of our own church are busy in translating for the benefit of English and American christians: "Holy Scripture no where teaches the eternal damnation of those who died as heathen or non-christians; it rather intimates, in many passages, that forgiveness may be possible beyond the grave, and refers the final decision not to death, but to the day of Christ—Acts xvii: 31; 2 Tim. i: 12; iv 8; 1 John iv: 17. But in our passage, as in Chapter iii: 19, 20, Peter by divine illumination clearly affirms that the ways of God's salvation do not terminate with earthly life, and that the Gospel is preached beyond the grave to those who have departed from this life without a knowledge of the same." This agrees with what Augustine inferred from Matthew xii: 32. "After the resurrection there will not be wanting those to whom, having endured the pains which the spirits of the dead suffer, mercy shall be granted that they may not be sent into the fire eternal. For it could not be truthfully said of some that their sins should be forgiven neither in this world, neither in the world to come, unless there were those who, failing of forgiveness here, would nevertheless receive

the remission of sins in the world to come." Of the same tenor are the words of Luther, written to Rechenberg, in 1522, some years after he had renounced the Church of Rome: "Whoso hath faith in Christ shall be saved. God forbid that I should limit the time for acquiring this faith to the present life. In the depths of the divine mercy there may be opportunity to win it in a future state."

I might quote other words of the same import from leading minds in the orthodox church of both ancient and modern times, but I forbear. I simply add the language which I have used in reference to this subject in the offending sermon: "That the efficacy and possible application of the atonement should be limited in all cases to this state of being, I cannot believe for a moment. When we look upon the amazing inequality of condition and opportunity which human life presents, millions passing into eternity every year from lands that have never heard of Christ, other millions in Christendom dying at all ages of life, in all degrees of human intelligence and light, with the moral nature of many evidently not hardened, still impressible and yielding under good influences; immortal beings in this condition going to their final account as rapidly as the ticking of your watch, night and day, age after age—the thought that *all*, then, who have not formally believed in Christ should sink down alike into eternal death, with no other opportunity of recovery, is not merely incredible, but simply monstrous." * * "Of the circumstances and methods under which Divine Wisdom will deal with the multitudes who pass into the future world, or next *αἰών*, unbelieving, yet with the moral nature not hopelessly hardened, I have nothing to say. On these points the Bible is silent, and I would not presume to be wise above what is written; but I cannot hesitate to express the joyful assurance—the character of God and the whole tenor of the Gospel are the warrant of its certain fulfillment—that no erring immortal, whom God's forbearing love can find means in that world to reach, and soften, and save, will ever be eternally lost." I now re-affirm these words, and if every one were printed in capitals, it would no more than express the energy of my conviction of their truth.

If I should put the doctrine which I believe to be fully sus-

tained by Scripture, in a form somewhat more dogmatic, it would be this: The trial of every soul is conducted under moral and spiritual laws that are rigidly impartial, and the crisis which decides the impossibility that the soul should be saved through the atonement of Christ, is not the death of the body, but the hardening of the moral sensibility to such degree that the truth and spirit of God make no further impression on the heart. This degree of hardness is manifestly not reached in the present life by all who die impenitent.

I have been told that this encourages the delay of repentance. On the contrary, I reply, it brings the motive to immediate repentance to bear on the mind with double force. It puts the great decision not on an uncertain date in time, which may be three-score and ten years or more distant, and over the fixing of which—whether near or remote—no mortal has control, unless he becomes guilty of suicide; but this view fixes the decision on a definite state of the soul which the sinner himself decides, and towards which he hastens just in proportion to his degree of light and the violence he does his own conscience in resisting or rejecting the truth. This view will also commend the Gospel to thinking minds with the more power, from the fact that it is divested of that strange look of arbitrariness and partiality which so perplexes men in the opposite doctrine. Their own reason and moral sense intuitively pronounce this fair and equal.

Thus, brethren of the Presbytery, I have stated my honest convictions respecting the points which you have named. It now remains for you to decide whether I can have liberty to hold and, at my own discretion, express these views, and continue to exercise my ministry in connection with your body. In my judgment, there are sufficient reasons why I ought not to consent that my liberty in this respect should be limited. To the right of private opinion you will all assent. When one believes it his solemn duty to speak his convictions and suppresses their utterance at the dictation of any man or body of men, or for fear of losing caste or place, or from any like motive, you know that he acts an insincere and unchristian part. He is not honest; and no ministry can be powerful for the truth which lacks honesty and sincerity. Ecclesiastical bodies have sometimes crippled the truth and corrupted instead of keeping pure



their own members, by unwise restrictions. Furthermore, to command me to be silent on what you are pleased to term my peculiar views, is to forbid me to use what I regard as the retributions of the world to come, as a motive to repentance. You would rob my preaching of that element of power. I could not honestly refer to the subject in such a way that I should be regarded as indorsing the current views in the popular mind. I must give my own explanations in order to be understood. Have I a right to give up a liberty in which such a vital matter is involved? Could your consciences submit to the dictation of Presbytery respecting the utterance of your views of the future state of the wicked? I am thoroughly convinced of the necessity of modifying the views of the future life which have been taught and received in our church. I have no hope of our successful progress till this shall be done. The danger of losing the hold of religion on the minds of the people by relaxing these teachings is almost infinitesimal. These teachings are well-nigh universally rejected now, and rejected, as I believe, on account of the false and unscriptural exaggerations under which future retributions have been preached from our pulpits and printed in our literature. Take the following examples and consider whether they do not justify this opinion.

Hopkins says of the wicked: "The smoke of their torment shall ascend up in the sight of the blessed forever and ever, and serve as a most clear glass always before their eyes to give them a bright and most affecting view. This display of the divine character will be most entertaining to all who love God—will give them the highest and most ineffable pleasure. Should the fire of this eternal punishment close, it would, in great measure, obscure the light of heaven, and put an end to a great part of the happiness and glory of the blessed." Jeremy Taylor preaches thus: "The bodies of the damned shall be crowded together in hell like grapes in a wine-press, which press one another till they burst. Every distinct sense and organ shall be assailed with its own appropriate and most exquisite sufferings. Husbands shall see their wives, parents shall see their children, tormented before their eyes." Dr. Gardiner Spring declares: "It will be a glorious deed when He who hung on Calvary shall cast those who have trodden His blood under their feet, into the furnace of fire,

where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. When the omnipotent and angry God, who has access to all the avenues of distress in the corporeal frame and all the inlets to agony in the intellectual constitution, undertakes to punish, He will convince the universe that He does not gird Himself for the work of retribution in vain." Our own Edwards could write: "The world will probably be converted into a great lake or liquid globe of fire—a vast ocean of fire—in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed; which will always be in tempest, in which they shall be tossed to and fro, having no rest day or night, vast waves or billows of fire continually rolling over their heads; their eyes, their tongues, their hands, their feet, their loins and their vitals, shall forever be full of glowing, melting fire, fierce enough to melt the very rocks and elements; and also they shall be eternally full of the most quick and lively sense to feel their torments—not for one minute, nor for one day, nor for one age, nor for two ages, nor for a hundred ages, nor for ten thousands of millions of ages, one after another, but forever and ever, without any end at all, and never, never be delivered." The next is from Spurgeon, and shall close the horror-sickening list: "When thou diest thy soul will be tormented alone; that will be a hell for it; but at the day of judgment, thy body will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin hells, thy soul sweating drops of blood and thy body suffused with agony. In fire, exactly like that which we have on earth, thy body will lie, asbestos-like, forever unconsumed—all thy veins roads for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the devil shall forever play his diabolical tune of 'Hell's Unutterable Lament.'"

I know that writings containing these quotations, and many others of the same sort, are in my own congregation and familiar to some of my most constant hearers. They represent these extracts as the teachings of the orthodox church. These are believed to be legitimate expressions, bating their material character somewhat, perhaps, of what we believe. Is it a wonder that many have discarded all faith in the doctrine of future retribution? The truth is frittered away by these boundless absurdities with which it is confounded. The question for us is not now what hold we may lose, but whether we can regain any hold on the popular mind for the truth. We shall never bring

that mind back to the old view. We could not if we would ; it would be undesirable, if we could. It requires but the slightest acquaintance with our moral nature, and the influence of motive upon it, to see that the overstrained horror of fear which that view must excite, where it gains the fullest assent possible, is essentially hardening and unhealthful, and positively diseasing to the moral sensibility. It must lower the moral tone of the mind. In the alternations between morbid excitement of fear and reaction into languor and indifference, it tends to fickleness in religious feeling and gross inconsistency in the outward life, and the church is abundantly reaping the fruits of this accomplished tendency now. The great body of the people have been driven to stand aloof from her communion and her ministrations. Many, probably the majority, of those who attend upon her worship, do so under silent protest against the revolting absurdities of her creed ; yea, many in her own communion, exercising the right of private judgment, more or less openly repudiate her most offensive dogmas. I know this to be fact. I mourn that the power of religion is thus needlessly crippled. My only aim in varying from the current teaching, is to recover and increase the power of religious truth among the people. I claim that the moral view of future retribution which I adopt and preach, commends itself to the reason and conscience as in accordance with the known laws of human experience and the intuitive principles of eternal justice and right. I feel sure that, if it cannot awaken the same spasmodic horror of animal fear, it will take a far stronger and more permanent hold than the opposite view on the minds of men, and exert a far more healthful influence on the moral being and life. I must, therefore, claim full liberty to give it expression. I know not but that your judgment will be that the demands of ecclesiastical order and the maintenance of your accepted standards of doctrine compel you to deny me this liberty in your connection. In that case I doubt not your action will be conscientious, and with more of kind feeling than ordinarily attends such exercise of authority. But I must here protest against such limitation of liberty and against the principle, doctrine or polity which necessitates or justifies it. I protest against it in the name of Christ and humanity. I protest in the name of a weakened church and a declining power of

religion. I protest in view of that fickleness of religious experience and low spiritual and moral tone of life apparent in the church and among those who adhere most tenaciously and strenuously to the old forms of doctrine, evincing the need of a nourishment that can come only from some modified teaching of the Gospel. I protest in the name of that freedom which is essential to the progress of the truth, under which science is taking such long and rapid strides forward—a progress more imperatively demanded in the domain of theology and practical religious doctrine and belief, but which such restriction of liberty, in just so far as it is regarded, must inevitably check and cut off. We may easily make our Confession of Faith a Pope more despotic and oppressive, and in the way of a growing light, than the Head of the Roman Hierarchy, for he is a living man and can modify former decrees and change an outgrown garment for a new one better fitting the expanding proportions of the wearer, suiting his Encyclicals, Bulls, Fulminations or Indulgences to the temper of the times, the growing enlightenment, or the particular circumstances of those for whom each is intended; whereas our standard Confession is fossilized, fixed, rigid, stiff and stony. Uttered three hundred years ago, it is just the same to-day as at its first deliverance, and has no power to adapt itself to the growing light of the ages, or the ever-varying demands of new conditions in the changing state and wants of the people. The Presbytery must take the liberty to be its modifying element, or it must inevitably become an obstacle to progress. I protest against making that Confession a Pope—changeless as it must be in its superannuated decrees—enthroned for all time over the faith and consciences of Presbytery and Laity. And with this protest, thanking you for the uniform personal kindness and courtesy which I have ever experienced from you, under all our differences, to which I here bear cheerful and grateful testimony, I submit the question to your decision.

ARGUMENT BEFORE SYNOD.

[The repetition of some thoughts expressed in the previous discussion was unavoidable in the following argument:]

Brethren of the Synod:

As I have felt constrained to appeal from the judgment of Presbytery condemning certain teachings of mine and forbidding their continuance, to your counsels and decision, it becomes me now, with your kind indulgence, to state my reasons for causing you, with much reluctance, this trouble. I do not come to beg your clemency, for I am conscious of neither crime nor error in this matter. I come to ask at your hands that liberty of expression which I believe the interests of the truth and the Church of Christ demand for all, and for the removal of a constraint inimical, in my view, to the highest progress of religion, and which neither the spirit of God can sanction nor the best spirit of the age tolerate. I trust that with a full understanding of the case your wisdom will see fit to grant this request.

Allow me, first, to state my motives for the public utterance of the views which have incurred the censure of Presbytery. My work as a pastor had made me acquainted with the fact, that some of the most earnest and thoughtful members of our Church were in great perplexity of mind about what seemed to them the hard and unreasonable views of the future state of the wicked common to all the creeds counted orthodox in our country. Outside of all Churches I found a still larger number with a true Christian experience and Christian aspirations, as I believed, standing aloof from our communion for the same reason, and thus largely deprived of the Christian culture which the Church and her ordinances were designed to give. I had for many years

deeply sympathized with the difficulties of such persons—(what earnest thinking mind has not?) I had come to believe that these difficulties arose, in part at least, from a misapprehension that confounded the faith of intelligent Christians with the fancies of popular superstition. I felt it to be my duty, as an interpreter of the word of God to the people, to ascertain, if possible, by the carefulest investigation, just what Revelation does teach on the subject, and present the result to those who were looking to me for spiritual guidance. To fulfill this duty I applied myself to the Holy Scriptures. I studied every passage of the New Testament which bears on the subject. I wrote them all out side by side in the Greek, that I might the more readily bring them under one view. I confess to a little surprise at finding the number of texts that even seem to assert the endlessness of future punishment so small. But I had no disposition to rest the doctrine on any numerical count. If *one* clear assertion of it could be found, I was resolved to receive and proclaim its truth. Having satisfied myself, by the fullest examination I could give, that the intrinsic force of the word used to express its duration does not settle the question, I was then led to inquire whether the contrast in which the punishment of the wicked was placed with the joyous life of the righteous, and the fact that the duration of each was expressed by the *same word*, would not compel the inference that the former would be without end. Here, in the absence of any explicit revelation on the point, I could only reason from the nature of the case, from what we know of the laws and powers of the soul. It is the nature of a healthy life to live and grow. It is equally the nature of a diseased life to decline and die. Hence I inferred, and ventured to publicly express the view, that the state of the finally unreclaimed in the world to come would be one of decreasing power and vital sensibility in the whole spiritual being. Respecting the duration of that state I purposely refrained from expressing an opinion. The word *αιώνιος* applied to it does not necessarily decide it to be endless; neither does the fact of its standing in contrast with eternal life, unless the nature of the soul involves such a conclusion, and I cannot foretell the possibilities of a human soul. I did, indeed, deny belief in any arbitrary, *ab extra* infliction of pain, or in any direct exertion of

divine power either to annihilate, or to hold the soul in life simply to keep it in suffering; but I have no data for saying how long such a soul may continue to exist. But to this view of a dying life in the future, Presbytery has seen fit to take strenuous exception. It is charged that it is speculation, and not revelation. I have answered that the opposite view of an eternally increasing power and misery is also a speculation, and not revelation. The latter labors under the further disadvantage, as it seems to me, that it is speculation opposed to all that we know of the laws or observe of the experience and tendencies of the human soul. And with all deference to my brethren, I must be permitted to say here, that the unanimity and urgency with which they have pressed this view as the only alternative to mine, has served to confirm me in the conviction that this whole subject needs to be reconsidered in our Church, and the minds of our people to be imbued with ideas freed from the unconscious influence of speculations that are irrational, and have no countenance from the word of God. I trust I shall be pardoned for adding here that I am well assured that the views I have taught on this subject would have measurably accomplished my object, and instead of corrupting the purity, would have contributed much to the strength of the Church which I serve, but for what I must regard as a most unfortunate and untimely interference of Presbytery with me and my work. This it is that has kept alive the agitation which had else long since died away.

But there is another point expressed incidentally in the discussion of the main subject, which calls for further notice here—the doctrine of possible repentance and forgiveness in the life to come for some souls. This, it seems, has given even more offense than the other. I have simply stated to Presbytery, at their request, *what* my belief is on this point, without giving, except in a very general and disconnected way, the reasons upon which it is based. With the permission of Synod, I will here state those reasons somewhat more in order. I am aware that it has been urged that the doctrine departs from our Confession of Faith, and that this fact with Presbyterians must be decisive against the liberty of teaching it in our pulpits. With some this reason may be final. I shall be slow to believe that it will be

so with a majority of this body. Are we going to assume that the Confession of Faith cannot possibly, in the progress of investigation, be shown to differ on any point from the Holy Scriptures? And if a doctrine can be abundantly verified from the teachings of Christ and his Apostles, as I claim this can be, are we going to confess that Presbyterianism is so rigid that it must sacrifice the liberty of teaching important truth to its system? I suppose that not one of your number would consent to be bound to the literal words of our Confession of Faith on every point. Some of you, I have heard assert with emphasis that you would not. This question of liberty, then, is one of degree. I am not without hope, therefore, that the reasons I may give will have some influence to enlarge the limits allowed so as to tolerate the free expression of a doctrine which I most solemnly believe to be taught in the word of God.

I find a general confirmation of the doctrine of future grace in all those passages of the New Testament which speak of Christ's descending into the lower parts of the earth (or the Underworld), ascending up on high, leading captivity captive (Eph. iv: 8, 9); of His soul not being left in hell (Hades, Acts ii: 27, 31); of His holding the keys of hell (Hades) and of death (Rev. i: 18); of the souls under the altar crying for their blood to be avenged (Rev. vi: 9, 10); also the words of Jesus to the penitent thief, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke xxiii: 43), and others of like import. The bearing of these passages on the matter before us becomes evident when we see their manifest allusion to the *current ideas of the Jews at that time concerning the world of departed spirits*. I shall refer to these ideas again a little further on. A more direct evidence is found in the following passages: Matt. xii: 32—"Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come;" 1 Pet. iii: 19, 20—"By which" [rather *in which*, i. e., in the spirit or *as a spirit* disembodied] "He [Christ] went and preached to the spirits in prison, who sometime were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah," etc.; and iv: 6—"For this cause was the Gospel preached to the dead" [not to *them that are dead*, as our translators have added to the original; simply *νεκροῖς ἐν ᾠγγελίᾳ*], plainly referring to iii: 19], "that they might be

judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." I shall not stop here to notice the evasions by which some have attempted to set aside the plain declaration of these passages; suffice it to say, that the most thoroughly reliable commentators, among whom we may name Alford, Lange, and Calvin himself, unite in teaching that they assert the preaching of the Gospel to spirits *after* they had cast off the mortal body. Now, what is the object of preaching the Gospel? We all admit that it is that sinners may be brought to repentance and receive forgiveness and eternal life. When, therefore, it is thus plainly declared that the Gospel was preached "to the spirits in prison," "to the dead," it is not easy to resist the conviction that it was to the end that they might repent and be forgiven. So when our Savior says that the sins of one class shall never be forgiven in the world to come, the natural inference from his language is, that the sins of some may then be forgiven. But when all these passages are viewed in the light of the sentiments known to have been widely held among the multitude to whom they were addressed, their force of evidence becomes, as it seems to me, overwhelming.

In the absence of any expression in the Old Testament, of a definite, formal conception of the future state, the Jews were left largely to their own speculations. As was to be expected, their ideas on the subject varied considerably in different ages. The influence of their contact with the Oriental mind, during and after the captivity, is particularly noticeable. The religion of those magians who came from the East to do the first homage to the infant Savior, did more than any other single influence to give shape to the Jewish ideas of the life to come which prevailed in the time of Christ. They held this conception of the *Under-world*: it is a place where all departed spirits are gathered to await their sentence at the resurrection—divided into two parts, the upper and the nether—the one for good, the other for bad spirits. This conception is essentially *Persian*. The name *Paradise*, given to the department of the good, is a Persian word. Gehenna, the place of the wicked, the nether Hades, is of well-known Jewish origin. The idea of the purification of spirits not hopelessly bad, very prominent in the Zoroastrian teachings, had become deeply wrought into the belief of that time. Says

Neander, speaking of the intermediate state as held by Tertulian and many Christians in the early Church: "With this representation of an intermediate state in Hades, it was not difficult to connect the notion of a continued penance and purification of believers after death. The source of this is to be sought for in the East, namely, in the ancient Persian doctrine of a purifying conflagration which was to precede the victory of Ormuz, and consume everything that was impure. It passed from them to the Jews and then to the Christians." (Hist. Christian Dogmas, Vol. 1, p. 252.) Basnage, in his history of the Jews, uses this language: "'Tis true, they divide the bottomless pit into two parts, the one above, the other below, where the torments are more racking; yet it is still the same place. The souls suffer in both, and are neither quiet nor happy in their retirement as those of the Fathers were in the *Limbus*. The uppermost part is allotted to the less sinful who there atone for their crimes." (pp. 390-1.) He also repeatedly alludes to their using prayers for the dead. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible (Art. Synagogue) tells us that: "Whatever account may be given of it, it is certain that Prayers for the Dead appear in the Christians' worship as soon as we have any trace of it after the immediate records of the Apostolic age. It has well been described by a writer, whom no one can suspect of Romish tendencies, as an 'immemorial practice.'" "There is a probability indefinitely great that prayers for the departed were familiar to the synagogue of Palestine, that the early Christian believers were not startled by them as an innovation, and that they passed uncondemned even by our Lord himself." It seems almost certain, then, that our Savior himself worshiped in synagogues where these prayers were a part of the liturgy. Understand my object, however, in adducing these passages; it is not to justify praying for the dead, or a belief in Purgatorial fires, but to show the prevalence in the time of Christ and his Apostles, of the belief in future repentance and forgiveness. The testimony might be multiplied, if it were necessary, to almost any extent. I have found no author who denies the fact. It is a historical certainty. What follows? The conclusion that Jesus and his Apostles were speaking into an atmosphere laden with this sentiment when they uttered the language above quoted and referred to. They employed the

very words and figures of speech in which that belief had been previously clothed. Without caution or qualification they speak of *one* sin that cannot be forgiven in the world to come, of Christ's descent into Hades, of his preaching the Gospel to the spirits in prison and to the dead. Peter, in arguing on the day of Pentecost that David, when he said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades," must have intended the resurrection of Christ, asserts that "David is not ascended into the heavens"—a clear indorsement of the common view that the spirits of the dead still lingered in Hades awaiting the resurrection. In perfect agreement with this, Jesus says to Mary after his resurrection: "I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say unto them: 'I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.'" He had been away from the body three days; he had accomplished his errand of preaching to the spirits in prison, but his soul *was not left in Hades*; he was about to ascend where David had not yet ascended—to heaven. Does this language mean anything? Are we to interpret it by that accepted canon of Biblical interpretation which requires us to take into view the customs of the time and the sentiments of those addressed in determining the meaning of what was said to them on any particular subject? How is it possible then that they should not have been understood as indorsing, by the use of such language, the belief which they must have known to be prevalent among their hearers? The case seems to me a clear one.

But there is further proof. The question naturally arose among the early converts, what had become of their heathen parents and remoter ancestors who had died without the knowledge of Christ. The sharp antagonism between Christianity and Paganism in that day, the persecution and contempt heaped upon the Christians, inclined many to the severer view of the future doom of the heathen; but many as decidedly took the ground that the opportunity to repent and believe, not enjoyed in this life, would be given in the next. In proof of this opinion, they urged such scriptures as have been cited above. A widespread legend that the Apostles descended into Hades to preach the Gospel (itself a clear evidence of the prevalent sentiment) was used for confirmation. The Church-Teachers of Alexandria

were especially distinct in their view. Says Clement : " If in this life there are so many ways for purification and repentance, how much more should there be after death ! The purification of souls, when separated from the body, will be easier. We can set no limits to the agency of the Redeemer; to redeem, to rescue, to discipline, is his work; and so will he continue to operate after this life." Origen inferred a hope for the heathen from the same grounds. It was not a point of orthodoxy with these worthy Church Fathers to believe that no soul can repent and be forgiven after death. If Christ preached to the spirits in prison who sinned in the days of Noah, why may he not preach to the spirits in prison that have sinned and left the body, under the same or greater ignorance, in other ages, in our own age? Is the missionary bound to tell the convert to-day that the whole line of his heathen ancestors is beyond doubt hopelessly lost? Is he bound to preach a Gospel from which this would be the quick inference of every thinking mind? I cannot so read the word of God. While I find absolutely nothing to justify such a view, I rejoice in the *better hope* which many particular passages and the whole spirit of the Gospel permit me to indulge. Nay, in the light of clearly established history, it seems to me that the Bible and this view must stand or fall together.

And now brethren, in concluding this paper, I will not dwell on the fact that the view it advocates is rapidly spreading in the Christian church; that it is well-nigh universal among the most orthodox religious teachers of Germany—those who are now furnishing us some of our best commentaries on the Bible; that it is widely held and openly proclaimed among English Christians. I will not insist on its intrinsic reasonableness, or my confidence in its healthful influence, or upon the need, as I see the religious wants of the time, that it should throw some relieving light on the overhard and gloomy features of prevalent teachings and sentiments. I only ask, are you going to commit the Presbyterian church and ministry on this coast to the policy of suppressing its discussion? Are you going to use your *authority* to ban it from your pulpits? Even if you were sure that it is an error, is this the true way to deal with it? Can you not trust the people who come into your churches to hear and judge for themselves? Is it necessary that they should be thus tenderly lap-

ped on the knees of Ecclesiasticism, their spiritual nutriment stringently prescribed for them, as if they were sickly children by no means to be left to any discretion in the choice of their diet? I have more trust than that in the moral instincts of the people. I have no fear for men when I see them stirred up to a earnest search after the truth. Let them hear, and then think and choose for themselves. He that seeketh finds. For my part, I desire hearers that *differ* from me. Save me from the doom of preaching to a people who do not *think* enough to differ from me. The harder they think and the clearer they are in the reasons for their differences, the more they profit me, and the better I ought to be pleased. It is honest differences of opinion freely expressed that most help us on towards the truth. The only thing that can save us from spiritual as well as mental stagnation is FREE DISCUSSION.

SERMONS.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ETERNAL LIFE.

JOHN xvii: 3, 4.—“And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

WE may have sometimes asked ourselves in a thoughtful mood: “What is Christianity? What distinguishes it from every other system of faith and philosophy and practical living? Just what did Christ propose to do for humanity in coming upon our earth, and how are we to come into the realization of the benefit which he has put within our reach?” We may look to my text, I think, for the true answer to these questions. Jesus came into the world to bring us eternal life. “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” In the inspiration of prayer which rises to the very heart of his Father’s counsels for the salvation of the world, the Savior breathes forth these words with the text: “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have FINISHED the work which thou gavest me to do.” His part is done. Only a few hours more of his earthly life remain. He anticipates as virtually accomplished the death-agonies which ere another sunset will close in the cry: “*It is finished.*” There is an undertone of joy in his words. They sound like the report of a conqueror bearing back to the Power who sent him forth, the news of triumphant success in his mission. They seem to say: “I have planted the seed of eternal life in the earth; I have grafted thy truth into the wild stock of human his-

tory, opened the springs of thy love in the human heart. I have fully prepared the way for the coming of thy kingdom on the earth. I seal the work with my blood; and come back to thee." Faith needs but to enter into the work he has thus "*finished*" to find eternal life. But you will observe that the text tells us what eternal life is. So far as I am aware, it is the only formal definition of its nature in the word of God: "This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." To know God is eternal life—that knowledge which comes in its highest perfection through faith in Jesus Christ. I take the latter clause as not asserting something additional to the former, as if eternal life consisted in knowing God and something more, but as explaining and amplifying the former. We know God in Christ and through Christ; and this is the very "life of God in the soul."

But we may ask more closely, what is the nature of this knowledge of God? In what aspect does it rise in the consciousness of the soul that knows God? Is it like the knowledge of any famous character in the past of whom history gives us some record, or the knowledge of any distant personage of the present—the Emperor Napoleon, for example, of whom we hear many reports, and of whose existence and power we see some limited evidences in the ships and subjects he sends to our own harbor? Or is it of the same nature as the knowledge of any principle of science or problem of geometry which we reason out or demonstrate from certain data given? Our reply must be that all these kinds of knowledge may be included in or at least minister to that which is eternal life. We do hear glorious reports of an Infinite Being; we see the evidence of his existence and power all around us; we can reason out some strong proofs *that* he is and, in some degree, *what* he is, from these data given; but you will all feel that the knowledge of God which is eternal life, must be more than



this; you will have anticipated me in saying that it is a knowledge which the heart alone can gain; like that which affection ever learns in sympathetic communion, when heart speaks to heart, soul to soul—IT IS LOVE. "Love is of God," says John, "and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." It is love that vitalizes our knowledge of God; without it all our other kinds of knowledge of him—our rational demonstrations of his being, our intellectual conceptions of his attributes, our whole natural theology—is cold and dead, mere withered husks. Men may reach its highest pinnacle of attainment, and still come short of eternal life. But "whosoever liveth and believeth in Jesus shall never die." He knows God *livingly*—heart to heart, soul to soul—holds fellowship with the *Manifested Life*. It is because we see in him whom the Father hath sent, God manifested to us as Love, moving us to a responsive love, that we come into the vital knowledge of God through him. All other divine manifestations combined do not make such impression on us; do not reveal God as He is revealed in fullness of love to us in his Son.

This knowledge of God practically realized, is Christianity. In other words, the Gospel of Christ is the heaven-sent means of imparting and perfecting that Divine knowledge which is a living sense of God's presence with us and of his love to us. I lay emphasis here upon the word *living*. This knowledge which takes so grand a name as eternal life, is no bright thought that comes to the Christian like angels' visits, no mere happy mood of bodily health which a headache may scatter, no gusty impulse of reform or well-doing varying with the barometer, no dreamy musings on indolent fictions called heaven; it is an ever-present, stalwart sense of the Infinite Truth and Goodness—confidence in his triumph, repose in his strength, joy in his light, quick response to his will—an active force pervading the believer's thoughts, moving his heart, the most abiding and inspiring spring, to action; that which holds and rules

and shapes and tempers his whole being as the heart pulses out life to the body. It is the indwelling consciousness of God; the reunion of the finite spirit with the great Father Spirit; and in its continuance the *life at home* of the returned and welcomed prodigal. This, we say, is the one aim of Christianity, the one mission of Christ to our earth, to awaken and nourish this knowledge of God, this vital principle of eternal life, this love in the souls of men; and the success of our Savior's errand to men—to us—will not be measured by the creed which we are persuaded to adopt or the professions we may be moved to make, but chiefly by two spiritual results wrought in our inward experience—first, the correction of that indifferent spirit of the world which forgets God altogether, lives as if he were not; secondly, the banishment of that horror of darkness under which the sense of the existence and presence of God crushes out every feeling of filial trust in him and blights every lovely and loving affection of the heart. These opposite tendencies, universal in human nature, are the strongest barriers against the Gospel in its efforts to impart the knowledge of God which is eternal life. Consider—

1. The worldliness that forgets God, lives in easy self-indulgence, as if He had no claim on us, as if He were not here, as if He were nowhere. This is in itself a sort of negative sin—heedlessness, not remembering, the mood of a child. At first glance it might not look serious; but when you remember the active propensities to evil which lie hidden under this innocent-looking indifference, you will not expect it to remain negative long; you will look for it to become, as it soon does, the black soil in which all positive evils take fertile root. But if there were no such tendencies to evil in the human heart the soul was created to know God, and could no more live in forgetfulness of Him than the plant could live without the air and the sun. Adam would have perished as surely, had he forgotten God, in the absorbing care of his fine garden, as he did by eat-

ing the forbidden apple. Is it not a law of the divine economy, as wide as our observation extends, that every life must have its own element and nourishment or it dies—the life of the tree, what the air and the earth will furnish; the life of the animal body, the provisions of nature or toil for its appetites; the life of the intellect, the various stimulants to thought? So there is a life in the soul, whose element and food is God. Take him away from that life, or let the soul turn away from him, and death ensues by inanition—would ensue if there were no disease. The un-nourished powers of the spirit wither and dry away. It would be as reasonable to expect the infant to reach the stature of manhood without food as to expect these germs of immortality to be developed without the living sense of God in them to support their life and feed their growth. It is a thought that should come home to us in our much respectable, worldliness, that the avocation we choose may be one which the word of God itself commends; that we may pursue it in a way not to offend, in the smallest particular, the good morals or good manners of society; that we may put our hand to no deed for the justification of which we cannot plead the “Christian conventionalities,” and yet rob our souls of their eternal life. We may not *remember* God. We may let the better life in us die for want of food. In many instances the dreary backslidings of God’s ancient people are condensed into the terse record, “They forgot God;” and the history of the great reformation, that were from time to time effected among them, through the word of the Lord, is often as tersely summed in the sentence, “They remembered the Lord their God.” The germs of all history worth the writing, both of good and evil, lie in these contrasted sentences; and we may each read our own biography in them if we will. The same cause will produce the same results in human experience, whether of races or of persons.

Now it is not through the cross alone that Jesus seeks to

recover us to mindfulness of God. By that he would indeed break up the deep sleep of our indifference, and startle us, if possible, into some sense of the fact that there is a God, and that He is not on a journey abroad that he should forget us, nor likely to become indifferent to us, whether we do well or ill. But he does not stop here. With a marvelous skill he aims to check our tendency to forgetfulness by associating the thought of God most intimately with every need and every pleasure that each day brings. How wise his method! He does not thunder God into our memory by the mighty events of an occasionally revealed omnipotence, by prodigies, or portents, or blasting judgments, or by mercies that bewilder us with joy. He does not depend on the great possibilities, fearful or hopeful, that lie in our own future. He simply points us to the common wants of every day, and the common blessings that satisfy them. He teaches every pain and every joy to remind us of God. "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Heavenly Father; and even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Your daily bread is not beneath his care, nor too small a boon for you to ask of him; and in asking to quicken anew his grateful memory. The tints of the lily rebuke your anxieties for raiment. Is not the same Maker acquainted with the scantiness of your wardrobe? Then to crown all other assurances, "He is more willing to give the Holy Spirit—Himself—to them that ask Him than earthly parents to give good gifts unto their children." The conscious *companionship* of God is offered us. Surely it is a marvel that we should forget him. Think now—

2. Of that sense of God and his relation to us which awakens only dread and terror of him. Thoughtlessness of God is not the only danger of the human heart. The *thought* of him sometimes drives the soul to an equal distance, and in that strange tendency of human nature to extremes which meet in like results, at last ends in heedless-

ness of him, and takes full license to all the evils which the heart prompts. The heathen mind has often been found oppressed with a vague dread of meeting some unrelenting Judge, some stern Nemesis of life's wrongs, in the world to come—a sense of God which rests in brooding horror upon the guilty soul, which they can find no means to shake off. It is not unusual to meet a similar state of mind under impressions imperfect and distorted, which have been received from the word of God, only intensified in its horror, it would seem, by the increase of light. God is known only as an enthroned Vengeance, and the soul cowers down before him in utter, abject terror. We cannot hesitate to pronounce such a sense of God unprofitable. It is not knowledge, but ignorance or mistake; it is not light, but darkness; it is not life, but death. There is no more power in it to heal the sinful soul than in the fear of devils who “also believe and tremble.” Further, we cannot hesitate to regard that style of pulpit teaching, and those representations of doctrine which bring and hold this element of horror in religious feeling into predominance over every other, as either false, or, at best, delusively partial and incomplete. Their impression is essentially erroneous. They will ultimately work the same mischief as their opposite error, which relaxes all sense of God's authority over us. They need to be softened and completed by that element of cheer and hope, and trust and love, which no one can fail to see in the foreground of all our Savior's teaching. Filial confidence, the needed balance of feeling between horror and forgetfulness, can be restored in no other way. It may be observed through the whole history of the church, when there has been this exaggeration of the terrific element in Christian teaching, the influence however powerful for the time, has not been lasting. The Christian life has not been nourished, but withered and blasted. Those periods have been followed by seasons of great laxity and corruption. Nay, even while such teachings have been

sounding their alarms in the ears of the church, the most lamentable uncharitableness of spirit and fierce contentions, and dissoluteness of morals even, have characterized her membership. These fictitious terrors are powerless against the worst sins of the heart, and seem to stimulate rather than repress the most flagrant forms of vice. The artificial penalty with which sin is threatened, gives an artificial tone and air to the religious virtues and experience, while the presumption insidiously takes possession of the mind, that some artificial way of escape will be found by which the sinner will have virtual impunity. So men learn to be nice and scrupulous on the technicalities of religion, forms, rites, prayers so many times a day, in certain places and postures, bead countings and the like, but careless of the eternal verities and immutable demands of God—as the Pharisee tithed mint and anise and cumin, and omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. Witness the Church of Rome in the dark ages, and over half Christendom in these ages of light—a sulphurous theology, and a preached word hot with never-ending flames in the cathedral, and a life that sets at nought every high virtue of manly character and every precept of moral purity in the world without. No people are more *religious*, in their way, than the Spanish races in Europe and on this continent, north and south; none are more corrupt.

I cannot help believing, and I feel it right for me to say, that I have observed the like results from the overstrained and unnatural appeals to fear that have made the chief reliance of many modern evangelists and revivalists (so called) in the Protestant Church. Extravagances of terror have been followed by relapses into apathy of religious action, heartlessness in religious professions, and increased dissoluteness of moral life. The effect has been unhappy in almost every respect. Further, I have long had a growing conviction, and I can no longer doubt that it is my duty to say, that there is a large element in the inherited theology

and literature, and general sentiment and cast of experience in our own church, which tends to the same result. Our Gospel seems to me, as popularly apprehended, partial and one-sided, if not actually erroneous. The fathers of our Church lived in stern times. They needed to be iron-willed and iron-nerved men. They were such. Their lives were heroic. Their history is a grand epic. They deserve the reverence in which we have been taught to hold them. But they naturally brought into prominence those aspects of Divine Revelation that suited the temper of their times. What wonder that they should have shaped their Gospel into something a little hard and stern? What wonder that we cannot transfer their type of teaching and experience to our times and our circumstances, without some feeling of incongruity? Could you transfer the stern views and sentiments and style of life native to the camp and the battlefield, to the quiet scenes of peace and home? It was to be expected also that lingering superstitions, brought with them out of the darkness from which they had just emerged, would color their teachings in some degree. We need not feel bound to receive these teachings as from heaven simply because our Church fathers—Calvin, Knox, Howe, Edwards and the like—held and taught them. We shall honor them better in reverently setting their errors aside. The rigidest conservative of the old way cannot refuse to confess that their whole system of doctrine and practical method of applying it, taken together, give a hard and arbitrary aspect to the character of God little like the Gospel Father. We should take a different impression of him if left simply to the New Testament. Whatever they intended they taught the sovereignty of God in a style that confounded sovereignty with arbitrariness in the minds of their pupils and hearers. He is made to seem arbitrary in his choice of the elect, and arbitrary in his reprobation of the rejected; arbitrary in the final reward of the righteous, and more arbitrary in the final punishment of the wicked. The sense of tyranny

which all this awakens overbalances the sense of God's Fatherhood. He repels instead of attracting. He awes love into distrust. The experience is gloomed with the shadow of dread. The heart cannot know him as he is. As a matter of fact this style of teaching has never been able to hold consecutive generations of Christians to its faith and spirit. Train one generation in it, and the children, or at the remotest the grand-children, would slide away from it. I am persuaded that one reason why the large amount of true religion outside of the Church in our day, does not come in and put itself under the full culture and enjoyment of Christian ordinances, is the repelling influence of this hard and artificial conception of Christian truth that still lingers in the Church and often crops out offensively in her teachings. That *unshepherded* religion has all the moral virtues and all the practical Christian charity and liberality and benevolence that are to be found in the most earnest of the membership; and I cannot doubt that Jesus, if He were now among us, would say to us as He said to His disciples, forbidding those to cast out devils in His name, who would not keep in the little company just about His person—"Let them alone; he that is not against us is on our part." Yet they do not often attain, and cannot be expected to attain, any great richness of Christian experience, or comfort of Christian faith, or large development of the Christian life, while thus standing aloof from the means that Christ has appointed for their best culture.

Time is not left me to say what I had designed to say in this connection on one doctrine upon which the subject under discussion has a direct bearing—the future punishment of those who die in impenitence. I propose to devote another sermon to that subject; I will only add a few words now to indicate the application I would make of the thoughts before us. It cannot be denied that the doctrine has been so handled in almost the entire Christian Church,

the teachings of Scripture upon it so surrounded and set off with circumstances of horror, heightened by every device of fervid imaginations, the Scriptural imagery so literalized, its deep spiritual import so grossly turned into material fact, that more than all other doctrines combined, this has been the means of investing God with a character of terror which the most devoted piety has found it hard to love or trust. I would speak here with the utmost care. While I cannot remain wholly silent, and keep a good conscience, I would not lift from human depravity one useful restraint, or weaken one motive that might lead a soul to the life of religion. The doctrine is an awful one. It ought to be presented as such, and made to be felt as such. No one can doubt this who regards the teachings of either Scripture or nature. Sin is an awful thing. God's treatment of it as recorded in His Word, and witnessed in His works and providences every day, and felt in our own pains of body and aches of the heart, abundantly attest it to be such. *Its future must be according to its character.* But the force of the true doctrine is only weakened and lost by surrounding it with artificial terrors. We must rid it of this fictitious and arbitrary character, or men will hold it a virtue in them to spurn it. In rejecting the absurdities with which it is clothed, they will generally confound these with the truth and cast all away together. And the religion of those who believe will too often be of that coarse and fitful stamp, which acting under such an impulse, can hardly fail to become. These artificial conceptions I have every reason to believe, are not generally in the faith of the orthodox Christian ministry, at least not in their grosser aspects; yet they are still largely in the *popular feeling*, and unquestioning *popular assent* of the orthodox Church. From the best of motives, no doubt, no means are taken to correct them. I doubt the wisdom of these motives. I doubt the expediency or Christian truthfulness of that hesitating silence in which they hold us. I

do not believe it ingenuous or right to make capital for sensational impression out of a mode of representation, which if our actual belief were known, would lose its power to produce such impression. I cannot consent to stand before you as a religious teacher in an attitude that would cause every allusion to this great truth of future retribution to be taken as an indorsement of absurdities which I do not and cannot hold. I cannot willingly be the cause of such impressions and conceptions of this subject in any of my hearers, as were created in my own mind in early life from the crude harangues of evangelists who were welcomed to nearly all orthodox pulpits. I do not wish the minds of my children to be infected with such horrors. If I thought they were imbibing such sentiments concerning the future, and their souls were being darkened by the feelings that ever attend these conceptions in our own loved Sabbath School, I should feel it my duty to withdraw them from its influences. I should feel that an obstacle, hard to overcome, was being created in their hearts to that knowledge of God which is eternal life.

As to the circumstances and external conditions of the future state, we can well afford to be sparing in our positive teachings. The Bible is almost entirely reticent with respect to them, speaking only in figures which act as suggestions to our experience. By this experience only can its language be interpreted. God will by no means clear the guilty. Sin is loss, eternal loss to the soul. This conviction should go with every step and every movement of our lives. Yet we may rest in the joyful assurance that God teaches no doctrine, requires no faith, which, if held with the utmost intensity of conviction that our minds can feel, would render impossible that cheerful spirit and full joy which He repeatedly enjoins. He clothes himself with no terrors that render love to Him timid and fearful; with none that in the clearest conception of His whole character do not win the heart to a deeper trust and more joyous rest in Him.

II. FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

MATTHEW XXV: 46. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

THE mission of Christ to our world, the one object of Christianity, is to give eternal life to men. This life, as we have shown in a previous discourse, is the knowledge of God, a living, ever trustful sense of His presence and love. That presentation of the Gospel which has most power to awaken and keep alive in the hearts of men this sense of God and of His relation to us, is nearest the truth. It most effectually answers the end of truth. If any system of teaching, *as a whole*, tends to weaken this sense of the divine presence and make men feel easy and careless in a life of worldliness that practically forgets God, it must be erroneous; it does not attain the end of the Gospel. If, on the other hand, any doctrine or system, *as a whole*, sets the character of God before us in such a light that the predominant feeling in contemplating him is one of dread and gloom, withering the filial spirit of love and trust, it must be false; it defeats the end of truth, darkening that knowledge of God which is eternal life. The true Gospel holds the experience in just balance between these extremes.

It will be readily seen that this thought has a bearing on the subject which we have proposed to discuss more fully this morning—the punishment of the wicked in the future life. Allow me to say in the outset that while I hold the truth of the doctrine to be absolutely certain if there is any future life, and we may trust either reason or revelation, I am willing to admit that much has been assumed as certain concerning it which was mere baseless inference, and much

has been held and taught and pressed in dogmatic assertion on the faith of others, which was but the grossest literalizing of Scriptural imagery. As with the opposite state of the redeemed, the great fact stands out boldly in Bible teachings; the manner and the circumstances are left in mystery. I shall dare to leave them thus. Where neither the word of God nor my own reason or experience give me a clear utterance to make, I shall have courage to say: "I don't know." I would free the truth so far as I may from that strange artificiality and absurd arbitrariness, the deposit of ages of superstition, which has crusted it over. Multitudes cannot distinguish the crust from the truth it hides. I would save this doctrine from the contempt into which these false conceptions have already brought it with many sober and earnest minds. I would save this motive as a power for the Gospel from the extinction which threatens it under its perversions. I would have you feel that the teachings of our Savior on this solemn subject, as reported by the Evangelists, are wholly reasonable and in agreement with our own experience as far as it goes, and with the observed order of things in which we live under the government of God.

The text before us sets "everlasting punishment" in direct contrast with "life eternal." The two ought to be viewed over against each other. The conception which we have already gained of eternal life, that knowledge of God, which is love, will throw its light over on its contrast and serve to bring out more vividly its real nature. The truest and intensest conception of spiritual death is just this contrast, the sense of God's being and presence which is not love, which is fear and dread and shrinking from his light, and choice of the darkness which enables it to forget him. We cannot call this knowledge; it is ignorance rather, spiritual night.

But let us first examine briefly the word in the text expressive of duration, by a singular taste translated *everlast-*

ing in one part and *eternal* in the other. I hardly need tell you that in the Greek it is the same word, *αἰώνιος*. This adjective perfectly corresponds in usage with the noun *αἰών*, from which it is formed, and which we have turned into English as *æon*. We have to inquire, therefore, what this word signifies. What is an *æon*? Our own Robinson, the greatest of New Testament lexicographers for the Greek, defines the import of the word as "*duration, the course or flow of time, in various relations as determined by the context.*" Used 1st. "For human *life, existence*;" 2d. "For time indefinite, *a period of the world, the world*;" 3d. "For endless duration, *perpetuity, eternity*." Numerous texts are cited to illustrate this variety of meaning in its different connections. I am satisfied from the fullest examination of the subject which I have been able to give, that the leading idea which the word was designed to awaken in the minds of those who listened to our Savior and his Apostles was that which we express by the word *dispensation*, a certain period or flow of time during which one connected series of events and changes runs its course and ends in some consummation which that series was working out. It is applied to human life, including that series of events which death brings to a close, dismissing the soul into the next *æon* with the resulting character formed in the present. It is applied to the Christian dispensation, consummated in the second coming of Christ. It is applied to the whole period of the history of this world consummated in the final judgment. In each case, the whole series of events tends to one grand end which closes the *æon*.

Now, here, I will ask you to notice particularly one fact which is the key to the view I am about to present. When this word of such varied signification as applied to the present course of time, is used as the measure of duration in speaking of the joys or sufferings of the future state, it is put in the plural number. It is *æons*, and generally with

the double plural, *æons of æons*, translated in our Bible *forever and ever*. The righteous shall reign by the river of life *unto æons of æons*. The smoke of torment ascends *unto æons of æons*. It has been the custom to say that this plural and double plural are intensive in signification, simply a stronger form of expression than the singular. I must think it more than this. Let the word bear with it into the future world its own proper meaning which measures a *dispensation*, a course of events that flows on through a limited period to some consummation which ends the series and marks the point of transition into the next æon or dispensation; then let us shape somewhat more distinctly the impressive idea which this must suggest of the future state of being.

1. Of the righteous. This word scatters at once the current conception of the heavenly life as an eternal monotony of psalm-singing or aimless, effortless ecstasies—as if the sinewy energies nourished by the hard struggle with evil, in God's service on earth, were to be softened and dissolved on cushions of eternal idleness, misnamed rest. We shall rather be taught to view the entrance upon that life as the starting forth on a new career of progress, measured and definite; a new goal of attainment set before the eye rousing the aspirations and leading on the endeavors; all the energies which grew under the training of the preceding life now needed, and girded anew for another stretch of the onward and upward advance, all progress still depending on effort, and the height of attainment exactly measured by the fidelity and earnestness with which the powers already gained are used—heroism still having its field and its opportunities; mediocrity still stimulated by superior example. And thus the soul runs its second course of life, measures off the second of its endless æons—the body of the resurrection in which it emerged from its earthly state then, it may be, undergoing a transfiguration that clothes the immortal with a glory as much transcending that which it

is just leaving behind as that exceeded the lower life of earth in which it began. And thus on forever, each new beginning made with the advantage of all the forces of knowledge and life gathered in the spheres below, the need of effort and the joy of success in rising toward the better aim, the higher glory, still and ever keying up the powers to more exalted effort. We may well believe that the soul will thus tread heights of divine knowledge, and make its home in spheres of light and love such as no earthly imagination has ever yet even faintly conceived. May not that *third* heaven, to which the Apostle tells us he knew a man that was caught up, be significant of more than mere position in space? Have you tacitly taken up the common impression that there is but *one* heaven, and that once safe among its joys there would be nothing for higher aspirations to reach after? And must it be presumption for the sinner who has received the spirit of adoption from above, to cherish the hope that he may yet dwell at home amid those utterances which Paul heard there, not lawful to be breathed on this lower world because there is no earthly language that will bear their ineffable meanings? Aye, may he not even hope to rise where he will listen to others too holy to be uttered even where Paul was permitted to hear those divine mysteries? O, a wonderful life must that be which runs on through æons of æons! A wonderful power is that spirit within us, created in the image of God, whose endless life can find full development in no briefer career! And do we not see in every growing life around us—the rush, the reed, the pine, the pear, the body of man—a type and mute prophecy of this growth of an immortal spirit through *stages* or æons of development? So deeply indeed is this written in nature as a universal law, that we find it difficult to conceive that any progressive life should advance by any other rule. How the deadening tameness of the common idea of heaven melts away before this mighty thought of Inspiration! And how boundless the motive to make the most of our opportunities

and of ourselves here by gathering all the possible force we may into our being which will all avail us for those æons of progress and higher attainment which stretch out in endless prospect before us. What occasions of mutual helpfulness, what service of rescue and sympathy for those struggling upward through the lower spheres may open to us in this advancing life of ages, we know not; but doubtless the limitless realms over which our Father reigns will afford scope for the largest powers that effort and discipline will ever gain.

2. But we must turn to the contrast—alas that sin has created the necessity!—the state of those who have heard the Gospel and deliberately refused to repent and believe. How are we to conceive of this? The Bible sets it in direct contrast with that growing life of which we have just taken a view. Experience will suggest help in our interpretation. A growing life will throw some light on a dying life. We have seen the former under its scriptural representation, as a loving knowledge of God, unfolding in ever-increasing light, and rising ever nearer its source through ascending spheres of revelation of the divine glory. We shall think of the latter, then, as ignorance of God, or that fearing, shrinking sense of his being which feels him without knowing him—in reality the deepest ignorance of what he is—a growing blindness that is ever closing in on the soul in thicker darkness. This, too, runs on through æons of æons, a dying life, sinking down through stages of decay, to a lower and still lower condition.

But will this be absolutely endless then? Must not the dying spark, growing ever feebler, at last go out in utter night? I must claim the privilege of limited powers here, and reply that I cannot tell. I shrink from no legitimate inference that may be drawn from the view just given, based as I believe it to be, on the Word of God. I must admit that the word before us expressive of duration, does not in itself decide the question—that its full meaning would be

answered if that wretched life should come to an end. The Bible, so far as I have been able to read, nowhere asserts the necessary immortality of a created soul; and I cannot affirm positively that the voice of nature or reason, to my degree of development at least, is absolutely clear and certain against the possible extinction of the self-conscious life. Still I find it impossible for me to believe that any being created in the image of God will ever cease to exist—that the divine spark from heaven will ever go out. There is a whisper within that seems to say that the power of an endless life beats in every human breast. Shall we imagine, then, that this dying life is the spiritual counterpart to that line in mathematics which forever approaches but never touches a curve—the spiritual asymptote of annihilation—a soul forever approaching but never touching non-existence.*

We can conceive of no good end to be answered by this prolonging of an infinitesimal existence. We must leave the subject where God has left it, veiled in mystery. Let the soul that rejects his mercy, and will not obey his word, go on into that awful mystery at its own guilty peril.

But is there certainly no hope that this dying life may, somewhere along the flow of the unending æons, be rescued, re-quickened, and turned back in an upward growth toward light and God? Where I cannot know, I must purposely leave my answer indefinite. I feel bound to say, according to the light given me, that nature, as she speaks with the voice of all known experience, seems to give no encouragement to such a hope. She reveals no inherent energies of

* My attention has been called to the fact that Dr. Bushnell (Vicarious Sacrifice, page 333 and onward,) presents a similar view of the future state, and I observe that he has fallen upon precisely the same illustration. I certainly received no help from him in forming this view, as I was not aware that he had presented anything like it until after this discourse was preached; but I am glad that the weight of such a name is to go in its favor, and that I can refer any who may be interested in his opinion to the masterly discussion he has given the subject.

A brother Presbyterian also writes me that Dr. Tayler Lewis, in his "Six Days of Creation," presents a like view of æon as denoting a "time-world," or *progressive dispensation*. His book I have never read; but the opinion of so ripe a scholar in Greek, and of so profound a thinker withal, is, I hardly need say, a strong testimony in favor of whichever side of such a question it may be given.

moral recuperation in such a sinking life to restore its enfeebled vitality, and enable it to rise again to moral health. Revelation also, although its words may bear another interpretation, seems to have shaped its language with the express design to discourage such hope. We cannot forget the bridgeless gulf between the rich man and Lazarus, cutting off all possible communication; we cannot forget the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched; we cannot forget the sin against the Holy Ghost that hath never forgiveness, neither in this æon nor in that which is to come; and when by the vivid light which John's pen throws into the future we look down along the dark æons, the last thing we see is the smoke of torment ascending still. Revelation will not permit us to see clearly beyond. If Christ and Him crucified be clearly offered and deliberately rejected here, we can conceive of no higher or more efficient means of salvation. We are expressly assured that there can be no second "sacrifice for sins," as if something were needed to supplement the deficiencies of the first.

If there is any basis of hope, therefore, it must be in the *unrevealed* methods and resources of that all-loving Father to whom all things are possible, even things harder than that a camel should go through the eye of a needle. We can easily conceive that Christ should be so presented to the sinner in another life, his suffering love so illustrated, the simple facts of his great sacrifice so cleared of the artificial theories by which they have been obscured in all ages of the Church, that his real atonement for sinful souls should seem a new truth never heard before. That the efficacy and possible application of that atonement should be limited *in all cases* to this state of being, I cannot believe for a moment. When we look upon the amazing inequality of condition and opportunity which human life presents—millions passing into eternity every year from lands that have never heard of Christ, other millions in Christendom itself dying at all ages of life, in all degrees of intelligence and light,

with the moral nature of many evidently not hardened, still impressible and yielding under good influences—immortal beings in this condition going to their final account as rapidly as the ticking of your watch, night and day, age after age—the thought that all these who have not formally believed in Christ should sink down alike into eternal death, with no other opportunity of recovery, is not merely incredible, but simply monstrous. It is safe to say that no reflecting mind believes this, because it is sheer impossibility to such a mind. It is felt that it would be a dark impeachment of the character of God. It contradicts the whole revelation of himself as he appears to us in his works and in his Word. The more deeply imbued with the spirit of the Gospel one becomes, the more revolting this idea grows to him. If other views of doctrine are held, which seem to demand this belief in logical consistency, the latent conviction that there must be some dark mistake in the theology or the reasoning which involves such a consequence, practically nullifies the theory. The hope that we are mistaken is stronger than the belief that we are right. If it should be said that such a belief is necessary to suitably impress us with the awful nature of sin, whose fearful workings and miseries we see around us and feel within us, the ready answer is that exaggeration of its consequences has much the same effect upon our feelings towards the turpitude of sin as the most softening palliations of its guilt. The extremes meet in a like influence. We cannot but believe that with human nature as it is, such a representation of the government of God, instead of deepening our feeling of guilt, must tend to unsettle all sense of the distinction between sin and holiness. We may paint the terrors of the law in such colors of extravagance as to awaken a sense of absurdity fatal to all motives of repentance. We may possess the imagination with such fictitious horrors that the repentance, and the whole religion to which they lead, are but the policy of the craven or the cringing of the slave.

There is reason for caution on this side as well as on the other. Exaggeration tends to corrupt the very heart of piety itself.

Of the circumstances and methods under which Divine Wisdom will deal with the millions who pass into the future world or next æon unbelieving, yet with the moral nature not hopelessly hardened, I have nothing to say. On these points the Bible is silent, and I would not presume to be wise above what is written; but I cannot hesitate to express the joyful assurance—the character of God and the whole tenor of the Gospel are the warrant of its certainty—that no erring immortal whom God's forbearing love can find means in that world to reach and soften and save, will ever be eternally lost. If any shall fear that the expression or indulgence of such assurance may lead to fatal procrastination of repentance, that fear should be allayed by the certainty under the view now given that every hour of such delay must be loss to the soul. Not only is the increase of growth cut off, but the better life is certainly growing weaker—dying. The difficulties of its recovery are accumulating. Reason tells us this. Experience tells it. Every law of our being known through reason and experience, joins with the word of God in giving it confirmation. And even if we might know that far down the ages of the future the divine life might be re-quickened in the neglecter of truth, who can tell the birth-pangs and struggles with accumulated difficulties through which that new life would have to break its way up from such a low condition back to the light? We know that they must be such as this earthly state, dark as it is, knows nothing of. And equally sure must we feel that the dwarfed soul snatched from such a depth must run its eternal course shorn of half its glory. Oh, no! the truth can never make sin feel that it is safe from danger, or give it the shadow of an excuse to delay repentance.

Now in drawing to a close, let us pause a moment upon the position we have reached, and gather up a few inferences that the view before us will justify:

1. That everlasting punishment is no material lake of fire, no arbitrary infliction of bodily pain in any form. I spend no words upon this point; the idea is simply too absurd to deserve or need other notice.

2. We infer that there will be no arbitrary exertion of divine power to hold the soul in life or eternally revitalize its powers that it may be kept in suffering. The plea for this idea has been that Justice or violated Law demands it. But what Justice? What Law? Is there any sense of justice in your breast or mine, any felt sanctity of God's broken Law, that demands this, or would be soothed or gratified by such an arbitrary prolongation of pain, or made more true and loyal to God by having it eternally before our eyes. Can you conceive that the heart of any intelligent creature of God, unless it should be the heart of a demon, could be other than revolted by such a spectacle? Dare to think unfettered by artificial theory or the fear that you will be doomed forever if you follow that holiest light which the Gospel kindles within you, and you will not hesitate in your answer.

3. We infer that respecting a state of retribution whose methods and incidents Revelation has left in utter mystery, we are not bound to receive any positive dogmatic faith framed out of the inferences of others, which revolts the purest and best feelings created within us by the word and Spirit of God. In other words, as God has revealed nothing *positive* about the manner and circumstances of future punishment, we are not bound to believe positive absurdities respecting them.

4. We infer that there is no reason in Scripture or nature to believe that there will be growth in the capacities of the wicked, and consequent increase of suffering as the æons of the future flow by. There is every reason to suppose the very opposite. Sin and suffering wither mind and heart, instead of increasing their capacities; and by a law as universal as our observation and experience *a dying life,*



physical, mental or moral is ever attended by a decreasing sensibility. We should, therefore, seem to be justified in believing that the climax of positive suffering for sin and the beginning of its abatement is reached either in this life or early in the next. Every disease has its inflammatory stage during which pain rages at its height; when this passes either into convalescence or decline, going on towards either health or death, the pain abates. So with the soul's disease of sin. Hence—

5. We infer that the retributive motive by which we should chiefly urge men to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is not positive suffering, but the fact that the divine powers of life in them are dying. It is loss rather than pain. It is the dying out of that capacity for the knowledge of God which is eternal life. A man might be willing to endure an age of pain if he could gain the whole world thereby; men often do consent to endure long and bitter suffering for worldly gain; but if the *loss* of the soul be the price of that gain, what can it profit? An agony of pain may attend the quenching of the bodily eye; but the saddest thing is not the pain but the *loss* of sight, shutting up the body in life-long darkness. There is pain, there is agony, attending the gradual darkening of the eye of the soul; but O, the sad thing is not the agony even in its bitterest measure; it is the quenching of the sight that shuts the soul up in the outer darkness—away from the light of God! The slow coming-on of spiritual blindness is a fearful thing. The pain is of consequence only as it warns of the great loss that threatens. And we know that if sin is not forsaken and God is not served and loved, that loss is sure, that blindness is deepening its night around the soul. Experience forbids one doubt of this. The truth is enforced by *certainty*.

And now, my friends, allow me to say, as I leave this subject with you, that my object in this discussion, my hope, has been to remove one great stumbling block that hinders

many from entering the Christian life, or from more openly declaring their religious interest. I have sought to set this matter of future punishment before you on those reasonable grounds where the Holy Scriptures have plainly placed it. I have pondered long and carefully and often painfully over it. I have felt a joy that I cannot tell in reaching settled convictions. An incubus of night that was stifling to every healthy and heavenly joy, has seemed to lift itself from my heart. A brighter sky opens its light over my head. A greener earth spreads itself beneath my feet. I no longer feel those shudderings of horror that used to quiver through every nerve as I went to the house of mourning and opened my lips to speak the word of life. I no longer feel compelled to choke back and smother those words of comfort and of *hope* which Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, has put into my heart—not clearing the guilty, making the retribution of ungodliness doubly sure, but giving hope to all and *for* all in this world or the world to come who will accept His mercy. I have a Gospel which on every occasion it is a delight to speak. I have believed that if this subject could be disencumbered of superstitious fictions and placed on true and reasonable grounds of certainty, there were many among my hearers who would feel a power in the appeal it makes to them which they would not resist. Am I mistaken? As it becomes known through this community that I hold and teach that view of everlasting punishment which has been opened before you to-day, shall a growing indifference to religion, a laxer morality, a freer worldliness, or an increasing vice among those who regard my opinion, prove my want of wisdom in speaking as I have done, and fulfill the boding prophecies of those who say it will not do to lift from the lives of men the restraint of those arbitrary horrors which I have ventured to call unreal? I cannot believe it. I feel assured of the opposite result. Surely I should not have uttered these thoughts to-day had I not believed them in the interest of true godliness; that they

would move a more earnest piety in the church, and a more healthful religious sentiment in the community at large. I have dared to cherish the confidence that if some of my hearers could be invited to come forward into a more decided religious position and life on terms which they would not feel it to be surrendering their own reason and self-respect to accept, and under motives which they would not feel that others must respect them the more for resisting, they would respond to that invitation. I am in a position to press such a call on you to-day—one that must fully accord with your own reason; one that every better impulse of your own heart must second. Shall this confidence meet with total disappointment? I will not yield to such a fear. It cannot be that the appeal to mere brute pain in rational beings should be mightier than the rescue of the divine life within us from loss, and the unfolding of its powers in an endless growth. It seems as though the deepest sleep of worldliness must rouse and shake off its lethargy at such a call. Shall it be heard here in vain?

III. FEAR, THE FOE OF LOVE.

1 JOHN iv: 18. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

EVERY government over subjects disposed to be insubordinate must use the motive of fear. Pains and penalties must bar every path of transgression. The threatened infliction must be made as sure as possible, that the evil-doer may feel that there is no hope of escape or impunity for crime. When human governments have secured public order and individual rights safe from disturbance or infringement, they rest satisfied; they concern themselves no further about the *motives* of obedience in the subject. But if a kingdom is set up, having for its object, primarily, not the restraint of transgression, but the reformation of offenders, and the awakening and bringing to perfection in them the spirit of obedience and loyalty, the case is quite different. Fear can no longer be the chief reliance. It cannot, of course, be wholly set aside. Indeed, its pressure will need to be felt with the greater urgency. The very fact that mercy and the chance of recovery are to be offered to the offender already under sentence, demands that the fires of retribution be made to blaze the more fiercely and surely along every path of sin; otherwise law and government themselves would be softened into a nerveless thing of sentiment, which incorrigible crime might safely hold in contempt. So long as the spirit of rebellion is not broken; so long as lingering moral weakness in the partially reclaimed tends to go astray or slacken the step in the way of reformation, penalty must sound its sharp, uncompromising warning. Fear must startle carelessness and indifference into reflection, quicken the laggard steps of sloth, and send energy into the purpose that seeks and applies the

means of reforming mercy. But the part of fear is soon done. Its help ends when earnest attention to the truth is gained. Fear cannot move one throb of penitent feeling; cannot stir one emotion of real hatred to sin; cannot kindle one holy longing or noble aspiration. It is an altogether selfish and debasing passion if prolonged in its action; and when it has operated the one result of gaining attention to the truth, if the reformation is to be anything more than outward, heartless action under its restraint, other motives must take possession of the heart and cast out fear. Fear is the deadly foe to the affections which are sought to be raised to a controlling power in the heart. It cannot co-exist with them. Other chords of feeling must be touched—other motive powers must be sprung into action. The truth must be so handled as to banish this very menial which has done it the service of gaining attention to its claims—now become a hindrance to its work. Hearty loyalty is impossible where fear predominates. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

Now it is but repeating the substance of what I have advanced in the former discourse on the theme before us, to say that the aim and end of Christ's kingdom in the world is not simply to restrain evil, but chiefly the reformation and recovery of sinners, and to make them perfect in love. He came to set up his kingdom for that object. He suits all its motives and influences to that end—not to rule merely, but to redeem; not to crush rebellion only, but to kindle enthusiastic loyalty; not to destroy life, but to save. Now, to take in the full scope of the influences by which he seeks to compass this end, we must begin with the fact that the world is lost. He finds it in that condition. The subjects he comes to save are in rebellion. They are hostile to his purpose of love to them. The first work on his hands is to make them sensible of this. They must be made to feel that they are lost, and in what their being lost consists—

alienation from God and enmity to his law. Hence, he first presents himself to them in the attitude of a king. He speaks with the tone of authority. It is a kingdom he has come to establish, not merely a benevolent association or moral reform society. Its right of dominion is universal; it extends to every creature. He is king. He will never let them lose sight of this fact. His part is not to coax, but to command. Their part is to submit and to obey. And he attends the announcement of his claims with the proclamation of penalties more awful than prophet or king had ever before denounced against rebellion. And there is this peculiarity in these penalties: they belong in their fullness to a future life. Their terror lies beyond the grave. "Fear not them that kill the body," he says, "and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him THAT AFTER HE HATH KILLED hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you fear him." It was *after* the rich man died and was buried that "he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." It is at the end of the world that He will send forth his angels to "sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into a furnace of fire." These images of terror had been used before, but never with such a reference—never as clearly intended to throw their lurid light into the eternal world. Indeed, no inspired prophet or teacher had ever before clearly revealed a future life—not so clearly at least but that a powerful sect among the Jews, admitting the Scriptures to be the word of God, denied the doctrine altogether. Doubtless many believed it—such as Job, and David, and Isaiah and Daniel, hoped and trusted with joyful confidence; but not one of them has left us a word to say that he knew he should live forever. They asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" but seemed to get only the echo of the question for an answer. Christ first "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." And right over against this revelation he sets its awful contrast, death; that dying

life which I have lately pictured to you. He was the first clear teacher in the Bible of such a death. And not only so, but he reiterates the fact with a strangely urgent frequency and varies its presentation in the most appalling figures. All that his Apostles have left on record bearing on the subject seems almost feeble and tame in comparison. Surely, such a fact as this, urged in such a manner from the lips of Love, Himself, must arrest the attention. No heedful soul can hear it and feel at ease in sin or safe in the delay of repentance. There is a *King* and a *kingdom* pressing claims upon him which he cannot resist without measureless peril. Under the interpretation of experience, by which alone we can get the real meaning of our Savior's fearful images, they are not likely to raise a sense of danger greater than the facts will justify.

But does the Savior stop with this proclamation of terror which simply turns the eye of the straying subject towards His kingdom, without moving or having power to move him one inch on his return to loyalty? Having raised the sharp cry of warning which startles the sinner into a sense of his danger and impels him to look earnestly around for a way of escape, will He count his work done, or trust the sinner's alarm to finish it and win him back to loyalty? Surely not! His real work is not yet begun. Terror is not a sense of sin. Fear of sin's consequences is not the feeling of its guilt and shame. Terror cannot teach gratitude. Alarm cannot win affection to goodness and worth. Fright cannot perfect in love. The feeling stands in the way as an antagonist to all these nobler motions of the heart. The real springs which Christ seeks to move are not yet touched. One essential thing remains to be done—God must be made to appear as a father to his erring child. He is known as a Sovereign, he must be made known as a Father. Sin that will not repent must die, but the sinner is the author of his own doom. God still loves him. The Father's heart yearns with infinite tenderness over the lost child. It is

not He that kindles the fires of retribution threatened; the sinner fans them with his own wicked hand. It is not He that will inflict the miseries of the long æons of future woe; the sinner will inflict them on himself. It is not His breast that burns with consuming fires; it is the soul that is alienated from him. The being that terror sees on the throne of the universe girt about with wrath is the phantom of a guilty conscience; the Infinite Sovereign is still a Father, and his infinite compassion will follow the incorrigible even in their perdition, of which they (not He) are the authors. Christ is the very embodiment of this truth to us—God our Father—his very coming speaks it: “God so loved the world that he sent him.” His teachings are all full of it; and his cross is but the emphasis which he lays on its expression. The one thing which the awakened sinner needs to feel is that God is his Father. Recovery to holiness is impossible till he feels this; perfection in love is impossible; salvation is impossible till then. It is the prime element in the means of redemption. So Christ has made it to glow along every line of his Gospel, and stamped it even upon every sentence of threatened penalty that sanctions the law of God. The one impress upon all which no one that looks can fail to see is the cross—the *Symbol of Love*.

What is the effect when this truth is seen and felt? First, the sinner knows and feels that every deed of sin is a mad stroke at Goodness and Love—the strongest of all influences to awaken a real sense of sin. Then he must know and feel that if he continues on in this way, he becomes the excuseless author of his own perdition. The responsibility is all on himself. God is not to be charged with one pain or anguish that his soul shall feel through the ages to come. They are the outgrowth of his own doings—they are the fruits of his own choice. God, his Father, would still rescue and relieve him if he could.

I regret that I feel obliged here to turn aside from the

development of this subject which I had at first designed, to explain more fully my object in this discussion and to correct misapprehensions. This sense of God's fatherhood and love is absolutely essential to any genuineness of repentance or soundness of piety. There is no healthy experience without it. It is under a sense of this fact that I have spoken. If any views of Christ's teachings are presented or held in such a manner as to leave the impression on the mind that God is arbitrary, unloving and vindictive in dealing with the wicked here or hereafter, that impression is fatal to the end we seek to gain by the Gospel. If such views have become extensively rooted in popular prejudice or charged upon the church through misapprehension, they must be corrected and neutralized or they cannot fail to work unbounded harm. And let no one imagine that our time is free from such views. When I see a whole community set aflame with reports that a minister teaches there is no hell because he simply denies that Christ taught the eternal torment of the wicked by material fire—as I saw in my own parish a few years ago—when I see such a man as the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London, print and send forth to his hundreds of thousands of readers a sermon asserting this material punishment, by fire, and in a volume widely commended by our own religious press without one protest against this perversion of Scripture; and when I see that crowds are ever ready to flock around the crude, religious sensationalist, whose chief capital of impression is this and kindred exaggerations, I cannot doubt the duty of those who feel that they know a better way to speak out plainly. Religion is brought into reproach with thinking men by these gross absurdities and the scenes which grow out of preaching them. We ought to say, with an emphasis that cannot be misunderstood, that they are no part of our faith; that we utterly repudiate them. But it is often asked, "why not use the very words and images which Christ has used to picture the coming doom of sin,

and let them make their own impression? Can you speak more wisely than He?" I answer, this would do very well had not those words and images become heaped with perverted interpretations and meanings that have taken wide hold of the popular mind, which utterly prevent, in many cases, their making the same impression now which every intelligent reader of Scripture knows they must have made on the minds of those who heard them as they fell from the lips of the Savior. All we ask is, that they should convey their Author's intended meaning and make his intended impression. All we are aiming at is, to set them in an attitude that will do this. Then they will be as much more powerful and abiding in their influence as they are nearer to His meaning. The effect of mere animal fright which they have often been used to produce, is an obstacle to true repentance, as we have seen, and really destructive of every true Gospel impression. A great temporary excitement has been produced at the expense of all steady and abiding Christian life. We know what scenes our country has witnessed under the name of revivals of religion, usually through the influence of wandering evangelists. We know the means used. We know the whole character of such excitements. We know the results. Nine out of every ten, sometimes ninety-nine out of every hundred, make a profession of religion and enter the church only to soon fall away. The class most numerously affected are the children, a pleasant fact in itself, but too often leaving the impression that religion is a matter that cannot command the attention and respect of *men*. The more sober class of the community are seen standing aloof from these scenes. Their judgment cannot approve them. To say that this is from the depravity of their hearts and native enmity to the truth is simply to insult all intelligence and common sense, for among the number will be found many of the most earnest Christian hearts. I cannot doubt that the proverbial fickleness of Christian professions

is largely attributable to this overstrained and unscriptural use of the motive of fear, (the most fickle of all passions) and the failure to counteract its influence by such appeals and instructions as would awaken more abiding principles of action. You will see many of a certain style of religion in the church coming forward on the occasions referred to, greatly roused and making a show of zeal that promises the finest results, only to settle back again as soon as "the revival is over," into their old ruts of worldliness and religious death, to drag their mired wheels heavily forward again in the old style. I cannot doubt that it is largely owing to the same cause that you will see such numbers in every large church taking the most solemn covenant that man ever vowed upon themselves four or six times a year, only to causelessly break it every week or every day during the intervening time—solemnly devoting themselves, their time, their money, their souls and bodies, their life to God; to live only for Him, to hold and use all they have for no other end than His service and glory, and then, so far as any earnest activity or real self-sacrifice or self-denial for religion is concerned, remaining undistinguished by one shade of difference from the more moral class of the irreligious world around them. The life of religion in the church has thus run fearfully low. When one looks upon this condition of things with a Christian heart, he can hardly fail to feel an inspiration as from God come upon him, as it came upon the Prophets of old, to lift up his voice in the cry of warning, and point out the better way and call the people of God to a better life. And if I must suffer for speaking the truth, let me suffer. Christ suffered more for the same cause before me; and the disciple is not above his master. I have no hope of seeing a higher life in the church till some one shall dare to speak something a little out of the line of the current preaching—such as you have heard from this pulpit, to go no further for an example, for the last three years. My object is not to relax the bonds of religious pro-

fession and make the Christian life easier, but to tighten them; not less earnestness, but more; not less revival, but more; not less repentance, but more; not less prayer and labor, but more; not less religion, but more.

I know that the coarser view of future punishment referred to, and corresponding fictions respecting future happiness, are not widely held in our own church. You will not very often hear them in our pulpits now. I am pleased that some of you have shown that you would be indignant with me if I should make such a misrepresentation. I gladly exonerate my brethren from such folly. But an odor of such teachings, once more common than now, still lingers unhealthily in popular religious sentiment; and no effectual means are taken, so far as I am aware, to disinfect the air of its presence. I am glad that I can give decided testimony from leading teachers in the orthodox church on this subject. It used to be one of the emphatic points urged in a lecture before his class by one I count my father in theology, now President of Union College, that the lost soul is the author of its own perdition. God punishes by leaving it to itself. Says another well-known teacher of New England: "If the sceptic bolts upon us with the question, 'Where is hell?' or the question whether we suppose a God of infinite goodness has occupied himself in excavating and fashioning a local state for the torment of bad men? it is enough to answer that a bad mind carries a hell with it, excavates its own place of torment, makes it deep and hot as with fire, and will assuredly be in that place whatever else may be true. * * * It has the fire and brimstone in itself, and the suffocating smoke and the darkness, and the thirst, and the worm that never dies—testifying always, 'I, myself, am hell.'" •Says the brilliant and eminently sound author of "Ecce Deus:" "God does not inflict the eternal misery; he simply points it out as the resultant of certain courses. Men often complain as if the misery were superimposed by God. It is not; it comes out

of the man, not from God." Let this suffice on that point. This is the point I aim to make—God is not the arbitrary and vindictive author of the lost soul's sufferings; and this testimony will apply not only to material burning, but to every other form of pain.

But there is a view of future punishment common among even thoughtful minds of the church in our country, which looks more plausible, but seems to me even more artificial and unscriptural than the former. This notion assumes that as the soul is to live forever, it must grow forever. Its capabilities must eternally increase; and if lost, its sin and its miseries must go on increasing in the same proportion. This would involve the result not only that the growing anguish would at last reach an unceasing agony that would be all but infinite, compared with which burning in literal flames would be cooling, but also that alongside the kingdom of God forever growing in holiness and joy, there would be a kingdom of evil forever increasing in power, enlarging eternally its forces of rebellion, and deepening the intensity and expanding the volume of its hatred to God. I will only say of this idea, that as there is not one line or syllable from the first letter of Genesis to the last of Revelation to support it, as it is entirely a speculative figment of the human mind, it cannot be made a point of orthodoxy to hold it or preach it. And as it is plainly contrary to our whole experience and observation, which shows diseased powers of body or mind after a brief period of unnaturally stimulated force, declining in strength, I fear that its influence will be the same as that of the grosser view which we all agree to discard, viz: to lead many thoughtful men to reject the whole doctrine, because they fail to discriminate it from an irrational exaggeration. The only safe way is to keep to the Scriptures and that reason and experience by which alone we can truly interpret them. I feel fully assured that this subject, presented in its real scriptural aspects, instead of so generally repelling men cultivated

to a high energy of thought, from all religion—as has been the fact with so many in France and Germany and other portions of Europe, and is in danger of becoming a fact at the chief centers of intelligence and human culture in our own land—will command a power over the most thoughtful and cultivated, as well as over all other classes, that will gladly be allowed to sway their convictions, helping to bring them into the sweet captivity of the love of Christ. Above all, may we take it for granted that no aspect of this doctrine, which sets God in the attitude of an unnatural father, vindictive, delighting in the pain of even a *lost* child, pursuing him with penal agonies even after there is no hope of recovery, can be true? A father's heart is in His breast towards us, and with Him is no variableness or shadow of turning. He will chastise His child most bitterly for his good; He will follow him with pains which his transgressions have no natural tendency to bring upon him, just as the loving parent will lay the rod upon his child with a smart which its disobedience would never of itself have made the child feel—God will punish with his own hand thus far *arbitrarily*, if you please; he does so often by his providences and manifold inflictions of grief and suffering—these are the strongest tokens of his love—but beyond the point of possible recovery, you cannot imagine that a father who ever loved should pursue his infatuated child with the hand of arbitrary and vindictive torments. No! The child may ruin himself; he may spurn that love; he may make his own eternity as miserable as an immortal soul can bear; but it is the child that does it, not the father—the child because he will, and the father cannot prevent him. God's infinite compassion follows him still—and there is no such power to move to repentance in the very last hopeful stage of a hardening soul as that love which follows with the anguished appeal, "How can I give thee up, Ephraim!" And there is no such sound of utter, desolate woe as the despairing word with which that love turns away hopeless—"Ephraim is

joined to idols; LET HIM ALONE!" Pursue him no further! pain him no more! He *will* die! LET HIM ALONE—ah, can any hearer of mine consent to go on to a heritage of sin and woe, in the life to come, with such a love sending its cry of despair after him? Let no word of mine ever be used to encourage such profitless risk.

A few words further as to the limits of hope. I have assumed that in the case of every soul, God's Spirit would follow up to the line where the moral vitality was exhausted; where the hardening sensibilities grow hopelessly hardened. One would think this no very extravagant assumption respecting a father that loves his child; but I care not to reassert this now. Let us dwell rather upon the danger of passing that limit where the Gospel ceases to affect the heart. I must tell you with all solemnity I believe that in many cases it lies far this side the grave. Whatever may be true of children and the heathen and the very ignorant, you who live under the full light of the Gospel and resist the claims of God under that light, urge yourselves on to and beyond that limit most rapidly. You waste and wear the moral sensibility with a fearfully prodigal violence. I must say also in fidelity to my own convictions of the truth—I must say to all—I must say to these young friends on my right hand and on my left—repeating in substance what I said in the previous discourse, that if such limit is once passed, I see no revealed ground of hope.* John tells us "There is a sin unto death, and there is a sin not unto death." I would not trifle with the ominous meaning in the first part of this sentence. It seems to point to a hopeless hardening of the heart which is spiritual death.

Finally. If I do not greatly err, this view of a dying moral life will retain a strong hold upon the mind after the

* The author has been charged with self-contradiction in this passage after the expression of *hope*, to be found at the close of the preceding sermon. He is not at pains to defend his self-consistency, assured as he is that there are few thoughtful Christians who will not, to their own hearts at least, confess the same hope. He is glad to see them capable of this inconsistency between their *hope* and their *belief*, when the latter has taken the unnatural form prevalent in the church. Let his critics, however, take in the whole scope of his argument in comparing these passages, and they will find slender ground for their charge.

threat of positive pains and penalties ceases to move any fear. Many of you I know can no longer be touched by the last-named motive. You have outgrown fear. You cannot feel it. You hear the most solemn of Christian utterances sounding their alarm without the quiver of a nerve. But you *can* see and know the tendency of a present experience. You *can* bring yourself to reflection and say, "I *know* that the religious life of which others tell is not in me. I *know* that my chief delight is not in God and those aspirations of prayer in which they find such joy. I *know* that whatever capacities of the better life in me are thus neglected, must be dying. I do not fear that I shall burn forever; but I do not wish this moral vitality of my soul to be quenched. I do not fear that my Father in Heaven will pursue me with the torments which his power might inflict; but I do not wish to shut myself away from his light and the sight of his glory forever. My own experience tells me that the inclination to the religious life, if repressed, grows weaker as the years pass by. I once felt a need of the soul, the sense of which is becoming more dim. I once thought that at some convenient season I should become a Christian; but years are gone and I am not one. Yesterday did nothing to make me one; to-day has done nothing; the life I am living does nothing; the interests that are growing more and more absorbing to me do nothing. Where is this to end? when is the new life from heaven to begin in me? Pain I do not fear; but this death of the soul, this starving and withering away of the holier sensibilities—O, I would be saved from that!" Thus finding a motive of an altogether different nature and impression, that should grow stronger in a thoughtful mind just in the ratio that the fears of childhood decline, your certain well-known moral state and tendency considered as a rational being should consider it, you may move with calm but earnest action to rescue that immortal spark of life that remains within you. Famishing souls, Christ waits to give you life! Receive bread from him and live!

IV. THE USES AND DANGERS OF SCEPTICISM.

MATTHEW ii: 16, 17. "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows, and saying: We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."

THE allusion here is to childish games. A group of children find themselves together in the market place. Naturally enough play is proposed. Some one seconds the motion, and it is carried by acclamation. Then comes the important matter of deciding what the play shall be. The dance is named and gets the majority of voices; but a respectable minority are displeased. They do not like the dance, and so as the lively music strikes up they stand aloof. Their coldness chills the sport and breaks up the game. But the more ardent are bent on play of some kind, so they propose a mimic funeral, and at once raised the wail by which professional mourners in that age were often hired to simulate grief. Nothing will do. The disaffected again hang back; and so the attempt at sport ends in mutual complaints and irritations. So with the men of this generation, Christ says. They are hard to please. Some take offense at one thing in religion, others at another; the result is that few believe. John Baptist was too austere. He came to them in his coarse garb and plain diet, and they were ready to call him mad and moon-struck, and wondered why he did not come out of the dreary wilderness and dress and eat and live like other people. Christ came eating and drinking, a genial, social man among the people, a frequent guest at weddings and feasts, thoroughly enjoying the good cheer and not at all select in his company, and they were ready to cry out that he was a glutton and tippler. They were too easy and worldly in their religion to

relish the self-denial of the former; they were too formal and conventional to tolerate the inroads of the latter on stiff tradition and routine. The result was that the grand message from God with which each was charged fell powerless on their ears.

Now, without claiming that the specific application here made was in the original design of our Savior's illustration, we shall keep entirely within its scope and spirit if we find two marked characteristics of our own time figured in these children of the market—the first is that easy traditionalism in religion that abides fast in the old and the accepted without question because it is too self-contented to think and too little in earnest to feel the need of a higher life; the second is that bold scepticism which accepts none of the higher truths of a spiritual religion because they cannot be reduced under the terms of its narrow logic. In the former we shall find the need of a service to truth which scepticism only can render; in the latter we shall find danger to religion and all that rests upon its revelations from heaven which the spirit of faith only can counteract. I am to speak, therefore, to-day on *the uses and dangers of scepticism*.

I must begin with a protest against two common errors—that which confounds faith with mere belief in certain specific doctrines, and that which confounds scepticism with infidelity. Faith is more than belief. Faith is a spiritual receptivity of divine truths, "things unseen and eternal," which makes their reality *real* to the soul, and lives in them. It is the gift of God wrought within by His Spirit. It is a power that rules the whole man. Belief is simply the assent of the intellect to a statement or proposition. It is an act of the intellect, and not of the heart. It may assent to all the essential truths of religion with as little effect on the moral or spiritual life as the geometrician feels in assenting to the definition of a straight line. Again, *Scepticism* is not the positive denial or rejection of any statement or doctrine, but simply doubts it, holding the judgment in

suspense for further evidence. It does not necessarily imply hostility to the truth, but may co-exist with the most earnest desire to know and do the truth. *Infidelity*, on the other hand, is downright rejection of the teachings of religion, and hearty enmity to them. Like faith, it is deep in the heart. It enlists its feelings against the truth, and carries on its warfare to the death. The real opposites, then, are faith and infidelity, both matters of the heart—and belief and scepticism, both matters of the intellect, and neither good or evil in themselves. As belief may lead to faith, so scepticism may lead to infidelity. There is danger on this side against which we need to be wakefully on our guard; but scepticism is not necessarily the antagonist to faith. Doubt of many particular doctrines of religion may exist along with true faith in Christ. The Calvinist doubts the peculiar doctrines of the Arminian creed, and the Arminian doubts the peculiar doctrines of the Calvinist's creed, and yet both have faith in Christ. Scepticism has often been the ally to the truths of faith, doing them most essential service. And we can hardly doubt that it has further work to do in behalf of religion in our own day. Let us, therefore, notice its uses.

1. It stands guard against the hasty admission of novelties in religion. The religious world is ever full of "lo-heres!" and "lo-theres!" If no honest doubters dared to meet upstart pretenders, coming in the name of Christ and demanding our assent to their teachings on the ground of divine authority, with the counter demand of proof for their claims, what would the church soon become? Instead of the pillar and ground of the truth, the ruined temple where every unclean error would find a home. Doubt holds all such pretentious novelties at the door of truth till investigation can try their claims. Its service, in this regard, is too obvious to need further remark. But,

2. Scepticism has a sturdier work to do for the truth, in testing the claims of doctrines and practices in religion that

are accepted and have been long established. It is easier to repel a new error than to uproot an old one. Those venerable customs and beliefs that have held their places among men through the centuries, though ever so absurd in themselves, come to claim our obedience and reverence at last by prescriptive right. They stand in the way of progress. They cramp both the mind and heart. They secretly nourish vices of temper and all falsities of life. But the million accept them as matters of course. They as little think of questioning their right to our regard as they think of questioning the right of the sun to rise. Now you will readily agree that where there are such errors, it is no sin to doubt them. It is noble to dare to question them when one must suffer for so doing. They must be questioned before the world can ever get rid of them. Doubt is the pioneer of progress the world over and the ages through. It goes before the truth to clear these old rooted errors out of the way. It lays its rough hand on them, reverently it may be, but firmly, and asks them to show the title of their right to be. In many things there can be no advance till this is done. It is so in the world of science. False theories and principles stand in the way of discovery. The truth can never be reached till they are cleared out of the way. Look a moment at the history of scientific discovery. From the days of Aristotle on through many ages, the men of thought were attempting to explore the secrets of all truth and tell us the principles on which this universe is built without much regard to the *facts* before them. They were going to use their reason, bring their acuteness to bear, and see how things *ought* to be; then they claimed authority to tell you by inference how you are bound to believe things *are*. The result was a vast amount of day-dreaming. Alchemy, that counterfeit of our modern chemistry which yields such noble results, went into the laboratory and spent countless years of time and sums of money in trying to distill the elixir of life that should give immortal youth to the body, or to find

the philosopher's stone whose touch should transmute all base substances into gold, and thus outyield all the El Dorados of the world. By and by a great *doubter* arose, Francis Bacon. He took the liberty of saying to the wise, "I suspect that the method we have taken to investigate nature is a mistake. I have a new way to propose. Let us first apply ourselves patiently to the examination of things as they *are*; analyze them, look at them on every side and see how God has made them; then we may know something reliable about how they *ought* to be." The world was startled. "What! question Aristotle's dictum. The wisest have not dared to do it for more than sixteen centuries!" But the doubter insisted and carried the day. At once science, which had so long been held nearly stationary, started forward with mighty strides. And our own great books and printing presses and railroads and steamers and myriad manufactories are but the later growth of what sprang from the germ of Bacon's new rule for thought and discovery. You have a clear parallel to this in religion. Doubt must go before the progress of truth, marching in the van. You and I will not have to search long to make the discovery that good men, even with God's word in their hands, may fall into error. The church has often gone astray. She has put darkness for light, and light for darkness. Look at her black millenium before the reformation. The ministers of religion had sanctified falsehood. Men sinned by the indulgence of grace. They were made to believe that the Pope held the keys of heaven and hell in his hand to open and shut for whomsoever he would; and through this belief he did hold the conscience of Christendom under his control. "Doubt at the peril of eternal flames" was the threat that suppressed all inquiry. "Believe and trust your religious guides," was taught as the substance of piety and the only way to heaven. What followed? Blind credulity was mistaken for Christian faith. Every iniquity flourished in the name of religion. The church herself gave a hot-bed culture to native depravity.



But by and by a great *religious doubter* rose—Martin Luther. He began to question this Popish way of salvation. He dared to put his hand against the great paste-board temple of Romish superstition to try its solidity—tremblingly at first, half afraid he should shake down some granite turret on his own head if he did unsettle these venerable-looking foundations; but the harder he pushed the more he doubted their firmness, until doubt grew into assurance that the flimsy fabric must fall. The new birth of Christendom sprang from that doubt. The old shell of tradition and formality was broken and thrown off. The young Church of Protestantism came forth in comparative freedom, full of life and power. It was the struggles of doubt heaving at this crust grown over the pure truth of the Gospel, that broke it asunder and let the new life forth. Was that scepticism wicked? Many honest but timid believers thought it so, and believed all things at stake if it could not be silenced—you and I have learned to shudder at the thought of the inheritance of superstition and darkness which must inevitably have been ours if fears, ever so well meaning, had succeeded in smothering that doubt. It would be an idle dream to imagine that the church is yet free from all serious error. The difference between the pure religion which the lips of our Savior taught and the dis-tempered, worldly lives which you and I lead is too great to allow of that hope. Must not other convulsions break up and heave off other crusts of formality and false teaching? Is there not more work for some earnest doubter to do? And shall we attempt to fix errors which we may be holding, upon our children and on all the generations to come by the effort to smother all questioning that could bring them to light?

3. Another service of scepticism is to send new life into established truth that has come to be held in a dead and formal way. We well know the tendency in human nature, in the church as well as out, to let down in its earnest-

ness for the best things it believes. When opinions are struggling to make their way and get a hold in the world, those who adopt them are sure to grasp and feel their meaning, and to weigh the contrary teachings to which they are opposed. Truth thus won in battle is wrought into the very life of the soul. It is an experience. It is full of power. But after these same opinions have gained their place in the general belief, the generations which succeed to them as the inheritance for which their fathers fought and suffered are too apt to accept them in mere passive assent that misses the feeling of their greatness. The form is retained; the power is lost. The grandest truths are in the creed; the meanest worldliness is in the life. This was the great obstacle which Christ encountered in the Pharisees. Their belief was correct. Paul, as a Christian, announced himself a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; and rejoiced to be tried for the hope of the resurrection, the distinctive article in the Pharisee's creed. The fault was not in their belief; but the mighty truth had lost its power in their hearts. Its inward experience had degenerated into swollen self-conceit; its outward practice into dead routine. Alas that the same has become so largely a fact with the orthodoxy of our day! We are willing to admit this of the church in Europe; but need we cross the ocean for example? Do we not often see in our own communion rightness of belief substituted for earnestness of life? Are not the doctrines of truth held before the heart as a shield to turn aside the appeals that call to more Christian action? Make such appeal to the easy professor wrapped up in his selfish plans and his worldly comforts; tell him what a Christ-like life is; tell him the need the world has of such lives now; call to self-denial—"Why! does he not *believe* all this?" "Yes, but do you live it? Do you make yourself felt in the world about you as a Christ-like man?" "Well—he thinks he does about as much as the average!" So the average life around him with such abatements as convenience suggests and a worldly

temper will always take the liberty of making, is his standard—not the law of Christ. Doubt will do such a religion the vastest service if, by seeming to shake the very pillars of truth, it throws the heart back on the old foundations, and compels it to see how grand they are, and feel how firm they are and know whether itself is really established upon them. A gale of scepticism is healthful in such case. Brethren, our own church all over the world needs her Luther as much as Rome ever needed *hers*. It is to be hoped, when God shall send him, she will greet him with other welcome than that to which Rome received hers. “But the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: ‘The Lord knoweth them that are his.’”

But we must turn to the dangers of scepticism—useful as it is, like other good servants, we must understand its habits and tendencies or it may work us disastrous mischief.

1. We notice the danger that scepticism will *destroy* only and not *build*. This is its natural tendency. It is destructive, not creative or constructive. It is not afraid to try the foundations of all old institutions and beliefs, and when it finds a rotten timber or a loosened stone it feels at liberty to tear it away. But this is perilous if no new material is put in to fill the place. Better generally to have left the old, poor as it was. Better tolerate the tares among the wheat till harvest, than uproot the wheat itself by prematurely plucking them up. Above all, should scepticism be on its guard against bringing into doubt the accepted doctrines of religion until it feels sure that it has some positive truth to propose, that will be better than that which it aims to change. It is the fashion with many to scout this doctrine of the church as an absurdity, and that ordinance of worship as a pitiful puerility for full-grown people, and to sneer at the divine inspiration of the Bible as the weak superstition of third-rate minds; but still they offer us nothing in place of what they would sweep away. They would unsettle confidence in all the

peculiar truths of Christianity; they would bring into disrepute all observances of God's worship, all faith in the Bible, all reverence for Christ, all controlling love to Him, and then have nothing better to suggest than a confused medley of guesses or dim philosophical abstractions. This is scepticism run mad. It is as if a great army of laborers should enter a vast forest and cut away and burn up every live thing, uprooting every noble tree to the lowest fiber that takes hold upon the ground, and then leave the bare earth to parch and bake in the sun. "Well, what have you accomplished?" you ask. "Why," they tell you, "the ground is at least cleared and ready for you to sow what you will." "Yes, but if you had nothing to sow, you had done better to have left the grand old forest than this dry, barren death. The growth which was there before was more beautiful and valuable than this sterile waste, or the noxious weeds that are now sure to spring rankly in its place." Let doubt have something to sow before it cuts away and burns the present growth. Let it be prepared to build before it destroys.

2. Another danger of doubt is one that touches the sceptic's own experience—it is that in questioning the teachings of religion the feelings will unconsciously take sides against distasteful truth, or pride of opinion will come in and prejudice the judgment. This is especially the danger of the young. I wish to warn my youthful hearers very earnestly against its insidious influence. One is often pained in this country to see the levity with which an irreverent and insincere scepticism treats the awful questions affecting our eternity. It seems to take delight in shocking the religious scruples of others, "actuated by the amiable wish," as another says, "to frighten pious mammas and maiden aunts." We need not say that such a spirit is not seeking the truth, and surely is not in the way to find it. Let us lay down an axiom here to be held in memory in connection with this subject: *Scepticism, in order to be useful and pro-*

gressive, must doubt in religion only that it may believe—Yes! only that it may believe—not doubt for the sake of doubting, or to seem original and different from others, or to make a show of liberality and mental independence, or to have the license of unbelief; but only to find the truth and do the truth. If there may be error in religious doctrines that demands caution and questioning, there is certainly also truth. So much an honest mind will take for granted. That truth is the most important that concerns our being. Hence this fact—the honest doubter in religion is always deeply in earnest. Doubt but stimulates his earnestness, as the landholder, whose titles are questioned, cannot rest till he has proved them good. Hear Luther making his convent walls at Erfurth resound with his midnight groans. There is the true sceptic. What he wants is truth, not evidence to fortify his own opinions, not opportunity of captious argument to display his own acuteness, not the sundering of all the bonds that bind him to God and exemption from all religious duty. He wants the truth that he may stay his faith and build his life upon it. And he can never rest till he reaches some settled convictions that give him something to believe with confidence, and a belief that gives him something to do with earnestness. But is the man in earnest who doubts and settles down into indifference and no religion, pays no worship to God, does no religious duty? What would you have thought of Bacon if, upon coming to the conviction that the current method of science was a mistake, he had pronounced all science a delusion, and all its devotees weak-minded enthusiasts, and so abandoning all investigation of nature had settled down into indifference and no science, to enjoy his French wines and English dinners? A doubter in earnest, struggling through suffering towards the light is a noble, aye, a sublime spectacle! A doubter thus paltering with evidence and trifling with eternity, is the emptiest of all triflers, with a canker at his heart that eats away all that is noble in character.

Finally. The last danger of scepticism I notice is, that doubts on particular doctrines of religion will unconsciously be allowed to neutralize the influence of all *undoubted* truth, and be made the excuse for entire inaction. The sceptic must be honest with himself. That some truths are doubtful to him is no reason why all should be rejected or neglected. The earnest seeker for truth will live up to his light. He will eagerly appropriate and use what he finds, even as the famishing wanderer, lost in the wilderness, will eagerly grasp and devour every nourishing root and wild berry, till he can find some better bread. I have no word of reproach for the sincere sceptic. I would speak tenderly to him. I would not add to the tortures of that rack, equaled by no earthly agony, which his mind often undergoes. If any soul needs sympathy, it is he. Rough words of distrust or denunciation upon the bared nerves of his sensibilities are not Christian faithfulness, but heartless cruelty. Some can never extend a charitable sympathy to him because they themselves have never believed earnestly enough to know what doubt means. They have taken everything for granted in such an easy, half-indifferent way that the eternity which the Bible teaches has never been of enough present importance to them for a question of its reality to arise. The more earnest believers in the church have ever known, especially in the earlier stages of their experience, what these rushes of doubt over the soul are, when the face is lifted to heaven and can see no God there—nothing but the empty sky that arches it over; and prayer seems but a childish chattering to one's self, and eternity is a black mystery that will not yield up to this side of the grave its fearful secret—whether it is an eternal sleep or something better, or something infinitely worse; and all religious hope mocks the heart, and the dark thought comes, "Perhaps Christ was, after all, but an erring man, and his Gospel is but a poor fable soon to be set aside and numbered among the myths and delusions with which other

human hearts have fed themselves on vain hopes; and then the spirit groans within—O God! O God! is it so then, that THOU mayst not be real?—that this universe is hollow and empty?—no great Father in it to love and be loved and trusted?—no heaven, no rest, no home for the panting and fevered soul when this hot and weary journey of life is ended?" The strongest believers, I say, in the beginnings of their faith have felt these shakings of doubt. To such they have proved but assuring tests of the eternal Rock on which their confidence is based. What the doubt of Luther was to the whole church, such baptisms of trial are to the individual Christian—the beginnings of a new life and a firmer faith, the winds which clear away the clouds from the face of the sky and let the pole-star of eternal truth shine out on the night again. He is stronger in faith ever after. And if any earnest doubter out of the church questions religion in this spirit, I verily believe it shall be well with him. God is not far from that soul. There are great, open, almost self-evident truths of faith, which amid all the strifes of opinion and sects and parties, are never seriously questioned. He will find these, and these will lead on to others. He will not stop short of convictions upon which he can rest, and a religion upon which he can act. But I must add, with all earnestness, that if any man allows his doubts on particular points of religious truth to excuse the entire lack of worship and stay all action in religion, it had been better for him that heathenish darkness had inclosed his mind from infancy. He is doing constant violence to his whole nature. His scepticism neutralizes all truth. Years of preaching will be heard to no profit. The clear stream of Gospel truth may be poured into his mind unceasingly, but his heart is not purified. Its sins remain; its corruptions increase; its evil passions grow more confirmed. Travelers tell us that the Dead Sea, thirteen hundred feet below the surface of the Mediterranean, with no visible outlet, receives into its waters the fresh and living stream of the Jordan in

a never-ceasing flow, yet these waters are not freshened or purified. Not a living thing dwells in them; not a green thing grows on their banks; death within, a wide, waste scene of death and desolation around! Such, my hearer, must your heart be under the power of a stagnant, insincere scepticism. The living waters of the Gospel may pour in year after year, yet it is not freshened or revived—another Dead Sea—death within and death around—the waters of death stagnant over the Sodom of unrevealed sin buried in its depths. It can never be pure till you get a faith that can pray and love and act.







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